

# Staying well in winter

This Winter is going to be especially difficult for the more vulnerable in our community as we all cope with the effects of fuel poverty. As members of a wonderful community we must all be prepared to 'look out and help out'. Just by showing concern for others we can help alleviate stress, improve wellbeing and hopefully prevent the terrible consequences of someone being taken ill as a result of Hypothermia. Cold weather can make some health problems worse and even lead to serious complications, especially for someone 65 or older, or with a long-term health condition.

## Who's most at risk from cold weather?

Some people are more vulnerable to the effects of cold weather. This includes:

- people aged 65 and older
- babies and children under the age of 5
- people on a low income (so cannot afford heating)
- people who have a long-term health condition
- people with a disability
- pregnant women
- people who have a mental health condition

## Get advice if you feel unwell

If you are 65 or over, or in one of the other at-risk groups, it's important to get medical help as soon as you feel unwell.

You can get help and advice from:

- a pharmacy – pharmacists can give treatment advice for a range of minor illnesses and can tell you if you need to see a doctor
- your GP – you may be able to speak to a GP online or over the phone, or go in for an appointment if they think you need to

- NHS 111 – go to [111.nhs.uk](https://111.nhs.uk) or call 111 if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do
- your neighbour.... don't be afraid to ask!

The sooner you get advice, the sooner you are likely to get better.

Information:

Call a pharmacy or contact them online before going in person. You can get medicines delivered or ask someone to collect them.

## Keep your home warm

Follow these tips to keep you and your family warm and well at home:

- if you're not very mobile, are 65 or over, or have a health condition, such as heart or lung disease, heat your home to at least 18C
- keep your bedroom at 18C all night if you can – and keep bedroom window closed
- if you're under 65, healthy and active, you can safely have your home cooler than 18C, as long as you're comfortable
- use a hot water bottle or electric blanket to keep warm in bed – but do not use both at the same time
- have at least 1 hot meal a day – eating regularly helps keep you warm
- have hot drinks regularly
- to reduce the risk of **sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)**, babies should sleep in rooms heated to between 16C and 20C
- draw curtains at dusk and keep doors closed to block out draughts
- get your heating system checked regularly by a qualified professional

## Look in on vulnerable neighbours and relatives

Check on older neighbours and relatives, and those with heart or breathing (respiratory) problems, to make sure they:

- are safe and well

- are warm enough, especially at night
- have stocks of food and medicines so they do not need to go out during very cold weather

Why not have your neighbour in for a meal one evening? Sharing your home heat, providing a warm meal and good company can have an amazingly positive effect.

If you're worried about a relative or elderly neighbour, contact your [local council](#) or call the Age UK helpline on [0800 678 1602](tel:08006781602) (8am to 7pm every day).

If you're concerned the person may have hypothermia, contact [NHS 111](#).

## 8 Ways to Keep Warm on a Budget

Heating bills will be considerably more expensive in the colder months, but there are plenty of things that you can do to stay warm without spending a fortune. Here are 8 ways to keep warm on a budget.

### 1) Block Out Draughts

The best way to keep your home warm without turning up the heating is to stop the current heat from escaping. Keep doors and windows closed and make sure that they are sealed properly around the edges. Use draught excluders to block gaps at the bottom of doors. If you don't have a draught excluder, you can easily make your own by stuffing tights with old socks or roll up a towel. If you have a chimney then make sure it is closed, or consider purchasing a chimney balloon to keep heat in and cold air out. Just remember that you can't light a fire with one in!

### 2) Use Your Curtains

The sun is still out there, even in the winter months, so open your curtains to let the light and natural warmth in. Then, when temperatures drop in the evening, close the curtains to keep the heat inside. The thicker your curtains are, the better they will be at blocking the heat from escaping. You can create thermal curtains from old blankets if you don't have thick curtains for the winter. If you have blinds, you should still open them during the day and close them at night. It is worthwhile to get thicker curtains, though, even if you have to make them yourself.

### 3) Lay Down Rugs

Covering floors is an important way to insulate your home. If you don't have a carpet, floors made of tile or laminate will absorb cold air. Walking on cold floors won't be pleasant! The way to prevent heat loss through the floor is to lay down rugs wherever you can. The thicker the rug, the warmer the floor will feel. Even if you do have carpet already, adding a rug as an extra layer of insulation can make a room feel so much warmer without turning the heating up. You can also take this as an opportunity to add new decor to your living spaces, since a patterned rug can make rooms feel more cheerful, too. You can even use blankets as rugs but beware of tripping.

### 4) Layering Up

Wearing multiple thin layers is more effective at keeping your body warm than wearing one thick layer. The layers trap air between them which helps to maintain your body heat. Wear long-sleeved tops and trousers to ensure that you are not losing heat through exposed skin. You can even wear hats, scarves, jumpers, and jackets indoors if you feel chilly inside. Keep blankets or throws handy to wrap around yourself or put over your lap if you are sitting down. When you go to bed, layer your covers as well. Even one blanket over your duvet can help.

## 5) Socks & Slippers

Keeping your feet warm is an important way to regulate your body temperature. You can do this by wearing thick socks or long bed socks. If you struggle to pull socks on, you can pick up a [sock aid](#) tool to make this easier for you. In addition to socks, wearing slippers around the house will keep your feet warm and insulated against any cold floors. Cushioned slippers with fluffy linings are ideal for comfort and warmth, as are [adjustable slippers](#) which you can tighten with a velcro strap to ensure that your feet stay snug and cosy inside your slippers.

## 6) Hot Food & Hot Drinks

When it's cold inside and out, the easiest way to warm yourself up is to eat a hot meal or sip on a hot drink. Hot chocolate and soup are popular in winter because they help you to warm up slowly. A nutritious stew or a fluffy jacket potato are also excellent candidates for a cosy winter meal. If you want to avoid stimulants, then you can opt for decaffeinated tea or coffee as your hot drink of choice. If you take a while to eat or to finish a drink, then you could use a thermal cup or dish to keep the contents warm for longer. This kind of dish allows you to fill a chamber with warm water and keep the food on the plate warm. You can also get a thermal mug with [one handle](#) or [two handles](#) to make it easier to hold as you take your time sipping.

## 7) Hot Water Bottles

One of the most budget-friendly heating solutions in winter is to fill a [hot water bottle](#) with warm water and tuck it in next to you, whether you are sitting down or lying in bed. They can last for years and keep you warm every winter whenever you need them. All you need is a kettle to boil the water (but remember not to pour boiling water straight into a hot water bottle!). You can get a handy [kettle tipper](#) if you are worried about safety when pouring hot

water. If you want something smaller or more flexible, that you can easily hold in your hand or tuck into pockets or between layers, you can try heat packs. These are always useful for keeping warm or treating injuries, and they can often double as cold packs for the summer, like the TheraPearl packs. You can microwave them to make them warm or freeze them to make them cold. If you spend a lot of time sitting down, then you can invest in a low-energy heated seat cover for your chair. Heated seat covers are great for soothing aches as well.

## 8) Keep Moving

Another way to get warm for free is simply to move around. If you keep your body moving, your blood will circulate better and warm you up. If you don't feel like doing exercises, you can be productive and clean your home. This has the double effect of warming you up and getting the tidying done so that everything is in order. If you have back pain which affects your movement, you can get a [waist support warmer](#) which both supports your back and retains heat. For those with restricted mobility, if the cold weather keeps you indoors then you can still stay cosy while constantly sitting down if you invest in an [electric foot warmer](#).

## Staying warm when you have a terminal illness

If you're living with a terminal illness such as cancer, organ failure, dementia, or other conditions, you may feel colder and need the heating on for longer. This can happen because of the impact of your condition on your body, and other changes because of your illness. For example, you may find you're not moving around as much, and leaving the house less often.

Living in a cold home can be damaging to your health and wellbeing, so it's important to access any support that's available to help with your heating costs.

## Winter Fuel Payment

The Winter Fuel Payment is a tax-free amount paid once a year to help with your heating bills. How much you get depends on your circumstances.

It's currently available across the UK

Winter Fuel Payment is not **means-tested**. This means whether you can get it and how much you get, is not affected by your income, savings or investments. It will not affect any other benefits you may get.

[Find out more about Winter Fuel Payment at GOV.UK.](#)

## Cold Weather Payment

Cold Weather Payments are tax-free payments for when the weather drops below a certain temperature. You usually need to be claiming certain benefits to qualify.

Cold Weather Payments do not affect any other benefits you may get.

[Visit GOV.UK for more information about Cold Weather Payment.](#)

## Warm Home Discount

Some energy suppliers offer a Warm Home Discount Scheme. This is a one-off discount on your energy bill – the money is not paid to you.

Check with your energy supplier to see if you're eligible for the Warm Home Discount Scheme and how to apply.

[Find out more about the Warm Home Discount Scheme at GOV.UK.](#)

## Other financial help and support

### Help from your energy supplier

Contact your energy supplier if you're worried about being able to afford your energy bills, or you cannot afford to top up your meter. Your supplier should

take your circumstances into account and offer help. Visit [Citizens Advice](#) for more information on contacting your energy supplier.

You could get help with energy saving improvements to your home through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO). Visit [GOV.UK](#) for more information about the ECO scheme, or contact your energy supplier.

### The Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register is a free support service offered by energy and water suppliers. It's for people who could be vulnerable, for example if you have a terminal illness. You could get extra help such as priority support in an emergency, and free gas safety checks if you also claim certain benefits. Contact the company you use directly or visit:

- [Ofgem](#) for electricity and gas in England and Wales
- [OfWat](#) for water in England and Wales

### Energy grants

- England, Wales and Scotland: visit [GOV.UK](#) to find energy grants and ways to save energy in your home.
  - You might be entitled to other grants too; contact our Citizens Advice Bureau 0800 1448848 for help.

### Fuel vouchers

If you cannot afford to top up your prepayment meter, you might be able to get a fuel voucher. Your local council or food bank may be able to help you get a fuel voucher. [Visit GOV.UK to find your local council.](#)

You could also get a fuel voucher if you do not use gas or electricity for your heating and you meet certain criteria – [contact Citizens Advice for more information.](#)

### Benefits

If you're having trouble paying bills, you could have some of them paid directly out of certain benefits payments. This includes rent, service charges, fuel or water bills. [Visit GOV.UK for more information about paying bills out of your benefits payments.](#)



## Lowering your energy bills

There are some things you can do which could help to lower the cost of your energy bills:

- You can make small changes to use less energy – [visit Energy Saving Trust for tips on how to save energy and lower your bills.](#)
- Switching your energy supplier can sometimes reduce your energy bills. It's important to get information and advice before you switch. [Citizens Advice](#) have a guide on changing energy suppliers.

## Where to get more information and advice

The organisations below can support you with questions and concerns about energy bills:

- [Marie Curie Support Line](#) on **0800 090 2309** provides general information about benefits and finances.
- [National Energy Action](#) provides advice and support to people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland struggling to heat their homes affordably.
- [British Gas Energy Trust](#) help families and individuals who are struggling to pay their energy bills across England, Wales and Scotland, no matter which energy company you are with.
- [Groundwork](#) have a Green Doctor service that offers free, impartial advice to help you take control of your bills, save energy where possible, and access other services available.
- [Scope](#) provide practical information and emotional support for anyone with a learning disability or physical impairment in England and Wales. This includes a Disability Energy Support service where they offer free energy and water advice to disabled people.
- [Citizens Advice](#) has trained advisers you can speak to and provides information on your rights, including benefits, housing, employment, debt, consumer and legal issues. Our nearest CAB is in Salisbury 0800 1448848
- [Macmillan Cancer Support](#) has welfare rights and energy advisers you can speak to, and provides practical, medical and financial support for people affected by cancer.

## Useful websites

[GOV.UK – help with your bills](#)

[Energy Saving Trust – information and guidance on saving energy and money](#)

[Ofgem – getting help if you cannot afford your energy bills](#)