

Winter wrapped up

A guide to keeping well
and staying warm in winter

Health &
wellbeing



SPREAD
THE
WARMTH

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*Age UK is the new force combining
Age Concern and Help the Aged.*

*With almost 120 years of combined
history to draw on, we are bringing
together our talents, services
and solutions to do more to enrich
the lives of people in later life.*

*The Age UK family includes Age Cymru,
Age NI and Age Scotland. There are
also more than 170 local Age UKs.*

This information guide has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be of use to you. Nothing in this guide should be construed as the giving of specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and is in no way intended as a substitute for professional medical advice specific to any individual case. Neither Age UK nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure that the information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

Please seek medical advice for guidance regarding the seasonal flu jab. It is particularly important to seek such advice if you suffer from an ongoing medical condition that may be affected by having the flu jab.

This guide was originally published in October 2010 and updated in August 2011. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this guide is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

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Age UK is the new force combining

AGE and **HELP THE AGED** **WE WILL**
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This guide has been produced with the support of E.ON.

Introduction

Winter isn't everyone's favourite season and there's no doubt that the cold weather can be a worry for those of us in later life. But with a little preparation, and by following some simple suggestions, we can help ourselves to stay healthy, safe and as comfortable as possible this winter. Keeping warm both inside and outside your home can help reduce your risk of serious health problems such as chest infections, heart attacks and stroke that are more common in the colder months. This guide explains what you can do to get yourself and your home ready for winter, as well as where to go for further information and support.

Throughout this guide you will find suggestions for organisations that can offer further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the 'Useful organisations' section (see pages 16–20). Contact details for organisations near you can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK should be able to help (see page 16).

As far as possible, the information given in this guide is applicable across the UK.

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

what
next?

This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

Preparing for winter

Getting ready for the cold weather – which can start as early as October – means that you are more likely to keep warm and well this winter. Here's a list of things you can do to help ward off the winter chills.

- Have your heating system serviced and chimney swept.
- If you have wood-burning, coal or gas heaters, make sure that you have adequate ventilation.
- Check with your energy supplier for further advice to help you prepare for winter.
- Check that your water stopcock is working properly.
- Have your electric blanket serviced – this should be done at least every three years.
- Make sure that your smoke alarm is working, and consider installing a carbon monoxide detector, in case air vents become blocked.
- Make sure that you claim all the financial support you can to help with heating bills. Your local Age UK can advise you.
- Dress in plenty of layers and make sure that you have some warm shoes or boots with non-slip soles.
- Keep a mixture of salt and sand handy to put on steps or paths in icy weather.
- Keep simple cold, flu and sore throat remedies in the house. Your pharmacist can make suggestions and can also advise you on how to manage minor illnesses.
- Follow up your GP's invitation to have a flu jab.

- Order repeat prescriptions in plenty of time, particularly if bad weather is forecast.
- Ask your local pharmacy if they offer a prescription pick-up and delivery service – this could be helpful if you can't leave the house.
- Keep basic food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it's too cold to go shopping.
- Eat healthily and keep as active as possible.
- If you smoke, think seriously about trying to stop.

Staying healthy

Cold weather means the beginning of the flu season and can cause particular difficulties if you have breathing and circulation problems. To help you stay well, it's important to keep warm at home and when you're outdoors, follow as healthy a lifestyle as you can, and have a flu jab.

Keep moving

Staying active is not only essential for your general wellbeing and fitness – it also generates heat and helps to keep you warm. So when you're indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour. Get up and walk around, make yourself a warm drink, and spread any chores throughout the day. Chair-based exercises and simply moving your arms and legs and wiggling your toes are helpful if walking is difficult.

Eat well

Hot meals and drinks help keep you warm, so eat at least one hot meal and have hot drinks during the day. Include a good range of foods in your diet and aim for five portions of fruit and vegetables each day, so that you're getting plenty of nutrients and vitamins. Remember that frozen vegetables are as good as fresh. Having a hot drink before bed and keeping one in a flask by your bedside are good ideas too.

Have a seasonal flu jab

If you're over 65, the Government recommends that you have a seasonal flu jab. Seasonal flu viruses are always changing, so you need to have a jab every year, using the latest vaccine. Flu is not only unpleasant but it can develop into pneumonia, which can be serious.

A flu jab is also recommended if you're under 65 but have a condition such as diabetes, a chronic heart, lung, kidney or liver problem, Parkinson's, or if you have had a stroke.

If you are in receipt of Carer's Allowance or are the carer of an older person whose welfare would be at risk if you fell ill, you are also eligible for a flu jab.

If you are 65 or over, the carer of an older person or have any of the above health conditions, your jab will be free.

It takes up to ten days for the vaccine to take effect, so it's best to have it early on in the cold season. Your vaccinated arm may be sore, or you may have a slight temperature or aching muscles for a few days, but other side effects are rare.

Check you've had a 'pneumo' jab

The 'pneumo' (or pneumococcal) jab is a one-off jab that helps protect you against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia. Ask your GP about it if you're over 65 and haven't had one.

Give up smoking

This is a good thing for your overall health, as smoking lowers your immune system and can cause serious health conditions. After you stop smoking you'll quickly notice that your breathing is easier and that doing any exercise is more comfortable. Ask at your GP practice about NHS services to help you give up. If you live in England, call the NHS free Smokefree Helpline on 0800 022 4332 or visit www.smokefree.nhs.uk. If you live in Wales, contact Stop Smoking Wales (see page 19). In Northern Ireland, call the Smokers' Helpline, and in Scotland call Smokeline (see page 19).



Protect yourself against chilblains

Chilblains are itchy, red swellings that occur when your skin gets cold and you try to warm up too quickly, often by sitting close to the radiator. If you suffer from these, dab the swellings with calamine or witch hazel to reduce itching, but don't scratch them as this could cause an infection.

To help prevent chilblains, keep your whole body warm at all times – there are helpful tips on the pages that follow. Wear trousers, socks or thick tights and a scarf, hat and gloves whenever you go out in the cold. Speak to your pharmacist for advice on treating chilblains and to your GP if you get them regularly or have diabetes.


Keep your spirits up

It's not unusual to feel a bit down in winter – particularly when the days are short and it gets dark by 4pm. Try to keep to your usual routines and if you can't visit friends or family, make sure that you phone them regularly for a chat. It helps to do something you enjoy every day. If possible, go for a short walk in the middle of the day, or at least go outside while there is daylight if it is not too cold. If you feel down for several weeks and it's stopping you going out, making you feel listless and lacking in energy, it's very important to share these feelings with someone, perhaps a friend or your GP.

**what
next?**

For more information on keeping healthy, see our free guide *Healthy living*.

Staying active is not only essential for your general wellbeing and fitness – it also generates heat and helps to keep you warm.



‘I was starting to panic about how I’d manage, when my neighbour suggested I call our local Age UK.’



Mary was worried about how she would manage at home when her heating stopped working.

‘I’ve lived in my house for the last 30 years and, while I love it here, it can get cold and draughty in winter. I’m usually fine with an extra jumper and hot-water bottle, but last January my heating stopped working. I called the council to tell them I was freezing cold, but they said it might be two weeks before someone came out to check my heating. I was starting to panic about how I’d manage, when my neighbour suggested I call our local Age UK to see if they could do anything.

‘I gave them a ring and the man I spoke to arranged for a portable heater to be sent round the same day. It was such a relief. I used it in my lounge, which meant I didn’t have to stay in bed all day to stay warm.

‘It was so cold that I don’t know how I would have survived if Age UK hadn’t given me a heater. I called back to say thank you, and the lady who answered gave me details of some grant schemes that could help to insulate my home. Next winter I’ll be prepared – I won’t have to dread the cold weather again.’



Keeping warm indoors and out

- Several thin layers of clothing will keep you warmer than one thick layer, as the layers trap warm air. Clothes made from wool, cotton and fleecy synthetic fibres are a good choice. Start with thermal underwear, warm tights or socks. You should always wear gloves and a hat and wrap a scarf around your face when you go out in cold weather, even for short intervals.
- If you are sitting down, a shawl or blanket will provide a lot of warmth. Try to keep your feet up, as the air is cooler at ground level.
- Wear warm clothes in bed. When very cold, wear thermal underwear, bed socks and even a hat – a lot of heat is lost through your head!
- Use a hot-water bottle or an electric blanket to warm the bed, but never use the two together as this can be very dangerous. Check whether your electric blanket can be kept on all night or whether it is only designed to warm the bed before you get in. Get it checked every three years by an expert – local trading standards departments often offer free testing, or you can ask at the shop where you bought the blanket. If you have any continence difficulties, talk to your doctor before using one.
- Don't sit or stand outside for long periods, as you'll quickly get cold.
- Choose boots with non-slip soles and a warm lining, or wear thermal socks. These keep you safe if the ground is slippery and keep your feet warm.

- Keep steps and paths free of ice. Sprinkle them with a mixture of salt and sand if the ground is icy – some councils provide sacks of salt and sand free of charge if you or someone else can go to pick them up.
- Consider fitting a grab rail if you have several steps at your front or back door. Ask your local Age UK for more information.
- Check local news and weather forecasts for advice when bad weather is forecast, or visit the Met Office website at www.metoffice.gov.uk

Making your home energy efficient

Energy prices are high at the moment, but heating your home is easier and cheaper if it is well insulated and your central heating works properly.

- Have your heating system serviced each year and check that it's working before the cold weather starts. Gas heating must be serviced by a Gas Safe-registered engineer – ask to see their Gas Safe ID card, or note down their licence card number. Visit the Gas Safe Register website or call the free helpline to find out how to check their licence, or to find a registered engineer in your area (see page 18).
- Ask your energy supplier about their Priority Service Register, a service for older and disabled people that includes free annual gas safety checks (if you meet certain criteria) and other services such as the option of having bills in Braille or large-print text.

- Draught-proof doors and windows, insulate the loft, lag the hot-water tank and pipes, and consider getting cavity-wall insulation. These measures help keep your house warm and bills down, and you may be able to get financial help to put them in place. The Energy Saving Trust or Home Heat Helpline can advise you (see pages 17 and 18).
- Find out whether you are eligible for a grant from the Government or energy suppliers to insulate your home and make it more energy efficient. Grants can be awarded to cover or contribute towards a range of energy-efficiency and heating improvements to your home. There may be a waiting list to get the work done and certain eligibility criteria and means-testing may apply. Warm Front operates in England but similar schemes operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (see page 20).
- Check your current energy tariff and shop around to see if you can get a better deal. Consumer Focus, the Government's consumer organisation, provides free information about how to choose and change energy suppliers on its website (see page 17). This does not apply to Northern Ireland. It also has details of price-comparison websites that follow the Consumer Focus Confidence Code. The Age UK Group has an association with E.ON, which offers an Age UK energy tariff. For more information, call E.ON on 0800 015 6784.
- Contact your energy supplier if you are having trouble paying your bills. Companies should not disconnect all-pensioner households during the winter months.

- Most people born before 6 January 1951 are entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment in 2011/12 to help with heating costs. Previous recipients should get the payment automatically, but if this is the first year you have become eligible, contact the Winter Fuel Payment helpline (see page 20) to ensure that you don't miss out.
- If you receive Pension Credit or certain other benefits, you are automatically paid an extra cold weather payment when the temperature is at freezing point or below for seven days in a row. Make sure that you claim all the benefits you are entitled to. Contact your local Age UK to arrange a benefits check (see page 16) or visit our website to use the online benefits calculator to check your entitlement – go to www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck

what next?

See our factsheet *Help with heating costs* or *Help with heating costs in Wales* for more information on getting support to keep your home warm. Also see our free guides *More money in your pocket: a guide to claiming benefits for people over pension age* and *Save energy, pay less*. If you are still working, see *Claiming benefits: a guide for people of working age*.

You can also download the advice leaflet *What to do when it is difficult to pay your energy bills* from the Consumer Focus website (see page 17). If you get disconnected from your gas supply and you are unhappy with the way your supplier responds to your complaint, contact Consumer Direct for advice (see page 17).

Keeping your home warm

Most of us spend a lot of time indoors in winter, so it's important that you are comfortable and safe. The colder your home, the higher the risk to health.

- The recommended temperature for your main living room is around 21°C (70°F), and the rest of the house should be heated to at least 18°C. We have included two thermometers at the back of this guide. You can use one in your living room (ideal temperature 21°C) and one in your bedroom (ideal temperature 18°C) to keep you warm in winter. It's so important to keep warm as you are at risk of a heart attack or a stroke or even hypothermia if you're exposed to a cold environment for a long time, or to extreme cold for only a short time.
- Get to know how the timer and thermostat on your heating system work. If it's very cold, set the timer to switch the heating on earlier, rather than turning the thermostat up to warm your house quickly.
- Close the curtains at dusk and fit thermal linings if you can. This will keep the heat in.
- Put guards on open fires, and be careful not to hang washing too close to the fire.
- Don't block up air vents, as fires and heaters need ventilation. Good ventilation also helps to prevent condensation. Get your carbon monoxide alarm checked, or get one fitted if you don't have one, as there is a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if air vents become blocked.
- If you're having difficulty paying your heating bills, Charis Grants offers help with utility debts (see page 17).

Spread the Warmth this winter with Age UK

Winter can be especially hard for many older people. Age UK and Age Cymru have launched a campaign called Spread the Warmth, which aims to tackle the problems that winter brings and make it easier for thousands of older people in need to manage during the colder months.

Some older people find it difficult to pay their heating bills and keep their homes warm enough. They are having to make difficult choices between daily basics like heating and eating. Age UK and Age Cymru believe that this must change.

But Spread the Warmth is about more than helping with fuel bills and warm clothes. We all struggle to get out and about when the weather takes a turn for the worse, and it can be particularly difficult for people who are disabled, in poor health or lonely. Many older people become isolated and more vulnerable.

We want to make winter better for older people – people who may otherwise have nowhere to turn. Age UK, supported by E.ON, is providing specialist information and advice, such as this booklet. Working with our partners, we are also delivering practical services like home visits, befriending, emergency grants, and information and advice. We will reach over 350,000 people this winter who desperately need our help to keep warm, healthy and in touch with others.

The logo consists of a solid orange square. Inside the square, the words "SPREAD THE WARMTH" are written in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, stacked in three lines: "SPREAD" on the top line, "THE" on the middle line, and "WARMTH" on the bottom line.

**SPREAD
THE
WARMTH**

Useful organisations

Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732

www.agescotland.org.uk

Charis Grants

Provides grants to clear utility debts owed to certain energy providers.

Tel: 01733 421 060

Email: admin@charisgrants.com

www.charisgrants.com

Consumer Direct

A consumer advice and complaints service.

Tel: 08454 04 05 06

(08454 04 05 05 for a Welsh-speaking adviser)

Visit the 'Government, citizens and rights' section of the Directgov website: www.direct.gov.uk

Consumer Focus

A support group that gives energy consumers advice on energy debt.

Tel: 020 7799 7900

www.consumerfocus.org.uk

Directgov

Includes advice on taking care of yourself in winter.

www.direct.gov.uk

Energy Saving Trust

Provides free advice on saving energy.

Tel: 0800 512 012 (to be put through to your nearest centre)

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Gas Safe Register

You can check if an engineer is on the register by visiting the website: www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Tel: 0800 408 5500

If you suspect a gas leak, call 0800 111 999 (free call) in England, Scotland or Wales, or 0800 002 001 (free call) in Northern Ireland.

Home Heat Helpline

Provides advice for people having difficulty paying their fuel bills. It offers advice on cheaper payment schemes, grants for insulating homes, how to get on to the Priority Services Register for extra services, and information on extra government benefits.

Tel: 0800 33 66 99 (free call)
www.homeheathelpline.org.uk

Keep Well this Winter

A Welsh Government campaign that provides information and advice to people aged over 65 on how to maintain their health during the winter months. Age Cymru co-ordinates the campaign in Wales.

www.kwtw.org.uk

Met Office

Check your local weather forecast and get advice on managing in severe weather conditions.

www.metoffice.gov.uk

NHS Choices

Provides information about NHS services, healthy living and health conditions.

www.nhs.uk

In Wales, visit www.wales.nhs.uk

In Scotland, visit www.nhs24.com

NHS Direct

NHS 24-hour helpline for advice if you feel unwell.

Call 0845 4647 if you live in England or Wales.

Call 08454 24 24 24 if you live in Scotland (NHS 24).

NHS Stop Smoking Services

NHS Smokefree

Tel: 0800 022 4332

www.smokefree.nhs.uk

In Wales, contact **Stop Smoking Wales** to find your local group and for general advice on quitting.

Tel: 0300 1000 069 (freephone)

www.stopsmokingwales.com

In Northern Ireland, call the **Smokers' Helpline**.

Tel: 0800 85 85 85.

In Scotland, call **Smokeline**.

Tel: 0800 84 84 84.

Warm Front

Provides grants for insulation and heating improvements to people in England.

Tel: 0800 316 2805

For more information, visit the 'Environment and greener living' section on the Directgov website: www.direct.gov.uk

Similar schemes run across the UK:

If you live in Wales, contact **Nest**

Tel: 0800 512 012 (free from a landline)
or 0300 456 2655 (free from a mobile phone)

www.nestwales.org.uk

If you live in Scotland, contact the

Energy Assistance Package

Tel: 0800 512 012
www.energyassistancepackage.com

If you live in Northern Ireland, contact **Warm Homes**

Tel: 0800 988 0559
www.warm-homes.com

Winter Fuel Payment helpline

Tel: 0845 9 15 15 15
www.direct.gov.uk/winterfuel

Notes

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How you can help to Spread the Warmth

Our work relies on donations. Every penny raised will help Age UK to ‘spread the warmth’ and will make all the difference to many thousands of people in later life. To help, visit **www.spreadthewarmth.org.uk/donate** or complete the form opposite.

Just £5 funds an adviser from the Age UK Advice line to help an older person in need, or their carer or relative. The adviser could give someone the information they need to keep warm, explaining the benefits they can claim to help with heating bills and making their home comfortable in winter.

Or, working with local partners, £5 could help cover the cost of providing warm clothes, a blanket or transport to a local day centre, offering support and companionship for an older person in need of assistance.

Just £5 funds an adviser from the Age UK Advice line to help an older person in need, or their carer or relative.



Can you help Spread the Warmth?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: Age UK, FREEPOST LON13041, PO Box 203, London N1 9BR. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit www.spreadthewarmth.org.uk/donate. If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
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Address:
Postcode:

Tel:	Email:
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By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick) MasterCard Visa CAF CharityCard
 Maestro American Express

(Maestro only)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Signature X
Expiry date	/	Issue no. (Maestro only)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		

Gift Aid declaration

(please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: __/__/__ (please complete). *Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



We will use the information you have supplied to communicate with you in line with Data Protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity no 1128267) comprises the Charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from them or carefully selected third parties, let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977.



What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on 0800 169 65 65 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *More money in your pocket: a guide to claiming benefits for people over pension age*
- *Save energy, pay less*

The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.