


AGE
Concern

Winter wrapped up

revised,
updated



Winter and the cold weather it brings are a source of worry to many older people. Preparing for winter and then following some simple suggestions can help you stay healthy, safe and as comfortable as possible. This leaflet explains what you can do to get yourself and your home ready for winter and where to go for further information and support.

Inside this leaflet

- page 3 Preparing for winter
 - 4 Staying healthy
 - 4 Keep moving
 - 4 Eat well
 - 5 Have a 'pneumo' jab and a flu jab
 - 5 Keep up to date about swine flu
 - 6 Give up smoking
 - 6 Protect yourself against chilblains
 - 6 Keep your spirits up
- 7 Keep warm indoors and out
- 8 Keeping your home warm
- 9 Heating your home
- 11 Useful organisations
- 12 What should I do now?

The four national Age Concerns in the UK have joined together with Help the Aged to form new national charities dedicated to improving the lives of older people.

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Age Concern is a federation of registered charities. Age Concern England (charity number 261794) has merged with Help the Aged (charity number 272786) to form Age UK, a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England: registered office address 207–221 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ, company number 6825798, registered charity number 1128267. Age Concern and Help the Aged are brands of Age UK. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI, Age Cymru.

Preparing for winter

Thinking ahead and getting ready for the cold weather – which can start as early as November – means you are more likely to keep warm and well this winter.

Twelve things you can do to prepare

- 1 Have your heating system serviced and chimney swept.
- 2 If you have wood-burning, coal or gas heaters – make sure you have adequate ventilation.
- 3 Have your electric blanket serviced at least every three years.
- 4 Make sure your smoke alarm is working.
- 5 Make sure you claim all the financial support you can to help with heating bills. Your local Age Concern can advise you.
- 6 Be sure you have some warm shoes or boots with non-slip soles.
- 7 Keep a mixture of salt and sand handy to put on steps or paths in icy weather.
- 8 Keep simple cold, flu and sore-throat remedies in the house. Your pharmacist can make suggestions and can also advise on how to manage minor illnesses.
- 9 Make sure you follow up your GP's invitation to have a flu jab.
- 10 Order repeat prescriptions in plenty of time, particularly if bad weather is forecast.
- 11 Keep basic food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it's too cold to go shopping.
- 12 If you smoke, think 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 healthy, it's important to keep warm at home and when you go out, follow as healthy a lifestyle as possible and have a flu jab.

Keep moving

Keeping active generates heat and so helps to keep you warm. It's good for general fitness and wellbeing too. So when indoors, try not to sit for more than an hour. Get up and walk around, make yourself a warm drink, spread 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

Eat at least one hot meal and have hot drinks during the day. Hot meals and drinks help keep you warm. Include a good range of foods in your diet and aim for five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Remember frozen vegetables are as good as fresh. Having a hot drink before bed and taking a flask to bed are good ideas too.





Have a ‘pneumo’ jab and a flu jab

Ask your GP about a ‘pneumo’ jab if you’re over 65 and haven’t had one. It’s a ‘one off’ jab that helps protect against pneumonia and septicaemia.

If you’re over 65 be sure to have a seasonal flu jab.

It’s also recommended if you’re under 65 with a condition such as diabetes, chronic heart, lung, kidney or liver problems, have Parkinson’s or have had a stroke. As well as being unpleasant, flu can develop into pneumonia, which can be serious. Seasonal flu viruses are always changing, so you need a jab every year, using the latest vaccine. They differ from the swine flu virus, so you need a seasonal flu jab and may be invited for a swine flu jab too.

Keep up to date about swine flu

A second wave of swine flu is anticipated this winter.

When a swine flu vaccine is available, people under or over 65 with any of the above conditions, are one of the priority groups to be offered a jab. For the latest information about swine flu or vaccination, watch for government adverts, call the swine flu information line, speak to your GP or check NHS Choices website.

▶ page 11

Give up smoking

This is always a good thing to consider. If you have a lung condition, you'll quickly notice your breathing is easier and taking exercise is more comfortable.

Protect yourself against chilblains

You may be susceptible to chilblains if you have poor circulation. They are itchy, red swellings that occur when your skin gets cold and you try to warm up too quickly, often in front of a fire. Feet, hands, nose and earlobes are particularly vulnerable. Dab the swellings with calamine 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 when out in the cold, a scarf and gloves. 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 easy to feel down when days are short and it can be dark by 4pm. So try to keep to your usual routines and if you can't visit friends, make sure you phone them regularly for a chat. It helps to try and do something you enjoy every day.

If you feel down for several weeks and it's stopping you going out, making you feel listless and lacking in energy, you might want to share these feelings with your GP.

Keep 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. Always wear gloves and a hat when you go out.
- **When sitting down indoors, keep a shawl or blanket handy in case you feel cold.** Try and 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 it's not safe to use both together).
- **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.** This keeps your feet warm and keeps you safe if the ground is slippery.
- **Keep steps and paths ice free.** Sprinkle them with a mixture of salt and sand if the ground is icy. Consider fitting a grab rail if you have several steps at your front or back door. Ask your local Age Concern for more information. ► **page 10**



Keeping your home warm

Most of us spend a lot of time indoors in winter. It is important that you are comfortable and safe.

- **The recommended temperature for rooms you use during the day is 21°C (70°F).** You might prefer a higher temperature in your living room and want to warm your bedroom before you go to bed.
- **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 and fit thermal linings if you can.** This will help 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 prevent condensation.



Heating your home

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 it's working before the cold weather starts.** Gas heating must be serviced by an engineer who is on the Gas Safety Register. ▶ [page 11](#)
- **If possible, draught-proof doors and windows, insulate the loft and lag the hot-water tank and pipes.** This helps keep your house warm and heating bills down. You may be able to get financial help to do this. The Energy Saving Trust can advise you. ▶ [page 11](#)
- **Grants from the government and energy suppliers may be available if you are over 60 to help heat and insulate your home.** Grants can be awarded to cover a range of energy-efficiency and heating improvements to your home. There may be a waiting list to get the work done and eligibility in some cases is means-tested. Warm Front operates in England but similar schemes operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. ▶ [page 11](#)
- **Contact your energy supplier if you are having trouble paying your bills.** Companies should not disconnect all-pensioner households during winter months. **Also ask about their Priority Service Register for older and disabled people.** Services available include a free gas safety check.

- **Most people aged 60 and over are entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment to help with heating costs.** Previous recipients should get the payment automatically but if you have not been eligible before, contact the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline. ► **page 11**
- **If you receive Pension Credit you are automatically paid an extra cold weather payment** when the temperature is at freezing or below for seven days in a row. **Make sure you claim all benefits you are entitled to.** Contact your local Age Concern to arrange a benefits check. ► **page 10**

Useful organisations

Age Concern

Information line: 0800 00 99 66 (free call)

Website: www.ageconcern.org.uk



In Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, contact:

Age Concern Northern Ireland

Tel: 0800 808 7575 (free call)

Website: www.ageconcernni.org

Scottish Helpline for Older People (Age Concern Scotland)

Tel: 0845 125 9732

Website: www.ageconcernscotlandandhelptheaged.org.uk

Age Concern Cymru

Tel: 029 2043 1555

Website: www.accymru.org.uk

Help the Aged

A range of free advice leaflets for older people is available from the Information and Resources Team or the website.

Tel: 020 7278 1114

Website: www.hta.org.uk

DirectGov

This website has up-to-date swine flu information.

Website: www.direct.gov.uk

Energy Saving Trust

Call 0800 512 012 (free call) to be put through to your nearest centre.

Website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Gas Safety Register

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



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.

NHS Choices

This website has up-to-date swine flu health information.

Website: www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct

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

Call 0845 4647 if you live in England or Wales,

08454 242424 if you live in Scotland.

Swine flu information line

For latest recorded information about swine flu.

Tel: 0800 1 513 513

Warm Front



Call 0800 316 2805 (free call) if you live in England,

0800 316 2815 (free call) if you live in Wales,

0800 512 012 (free call) if you live in Scotland,

0800 181 667 (free call) if you live in Northern Ireland.

Winter Fuel Payment Helpline

Call 0845 9 15 15 15.

What should I do now?

If you would like more information on the issues covered in this leaflet or to obtain it in a more accessible format, please call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or visit www.ageconcern.org.uk/information

The following Age Concern information guides may also be useful:

- *Save more, pay less – improving energy efficiency*
- *What can you claim?*

Age Concern publishes a range of books on issues relevant to older people. Browse our online bookshop at www.ageconcern.org.uk/bookshop

Contact details for your local Age Concern may be in the box below. If not, call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call).



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