

Winter wise

Ways to look after yourself
during the coldest months



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Thank you

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While some information may apply across the UK, generally our guides cover England.

Date of publication:

August 2021

Next review date:

August 2023

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About this guide



Winter can bring extra challenges. Dark evenings and icy pavements can make it hard to get out, while cold weather can make us vulnerable to illness. It's not just severe weather that causes problems – even average winter temperatures can affect our health.

With a bit of planning, you can take some simple steps to prepare yourself and your home for winter. This guide has tips on staying healthy and safe, as well as information about the help you can get with higher winter fuel costs.

You can use our two checklists, **Preparing for winter** and **Staying well during winter**, to plan for the colder months. Download them at independentage.org/staying-well-in-winter or call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to ask for a copy.

1 Looking after yourself



Many of these tips will seem like common sense. However, it's a good idea to think about them in advance, to make sure you have everything you need for when the weather turns chilly.

Wrap up warm

Layer your clothes to stay warm – the layers will trap warm air between them and keep you warmer than one thick jumper. Wear a hat and gloves when you go outside and wrap a scarf around your face to warm the air you breathe in. Wear water resistant shoes to keep your feet warm. If you have a breathing or heart problem, stay indoors when the weather is very cold.

Wrapping up warm can help protect you against chilblains. These are small, itchy red patches that appear if you've tried to warm up too quickly after going out in the cold or damp. Avoid scratching at your skin and they should clear up on their own in two to three weeks.

Take care outside in icy weather

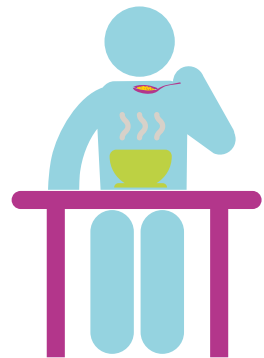
If you have to go out when it's icy, wear shoes with good grip and a warm lining, and put on thick socks. Keep grit and/or salt to put on your path. Some councils provide free bags of this or you can buy it from a DIY store.

Eat well

Food is a vital source of energy that helps keep you warm. Have hot drinks and hot meals regularly throughout the day. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables to boost your immune system and give you more energy.

The NHS Eatwell Guide can help you aim for a healthy and balanced diet ([nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide)).

If you're having trouble affording food, you could contact your local food bank. They can provide emergency food and support. The Trussell Trust has more information on where you can find a food bank ([01722 580 178, trusselltrust.org](https://www.trusselltrust.org)) or you can ask your local council.



Keep your cupboards and freezer well stocked

Keep basic food items for times when it's too cold to go out. Think about stocking up on tinned and dry foods, such as:

- tinned soup
- baked beans
- long-life milk and fruit juice
- ready-made sauces
- pasta and rice.



Keep frozen vegetables, meat, fish and bread in your freezer, if you have one.

You could consider doing your food shopping online, if you can. You can get groceries delivered to your door (usually for either a small fee or free if you spend a certain amount).

Some charities offer help if you have difficulty with food shopping. For example, Age UK provides home delivery services for a small fee. You can search for services near you on their website or call them for more information ([0800 678 1602](tel:08006781602), ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/shopping).

Stay active

Get outside if it isn't icy or too cold. It can boost your mood to get outdoors in the daylight, and it's good for your muscles and bones too.

If you're indoors, don't sit still for more than an hour. If you're online, you could take part in virtual fitness classes. For example, Extend offers online classes that includes seated and standing exercises ([01582 832760](tel:01582832760), [extend.org.uk](https://www.extend.org.uk)).

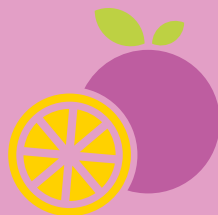
If you have health or mobility problems, talk to your GP about how much and what sort of exercises you can do.

Look after your mental health

You might find that your mood is affected by the darker and colder months, especially if you can't get out as much. If you're finding it hard to cope, speak to your GP.

As well as exercising and eating well, staying connected with others can help to improve your mental health. Read our factsheet **How to stay socially connected** for tips on things you could try.

2 Staying healthy



Get your flu jab

It's important to have a flu jab every year. Even if you had one last year, it might not protect you from this year's flu. It's free if:

- you're 65 or over
- you're a carer
- you have certain health conditions, such as diabetes or asthma.

In certain circumstances, it will be available for free to more groups of people, including those aged 50 to 64. Check with your GP surgery or pharmacy.

Flu is more than just a bad cold and can increase your risk of more serious illnesses such as pneumonia. It's best to get the jab as early as possible, before the winter flu season. Make an appointment with your GP or see if your local pharmacy offers the flu jab.

Check you've had a pneumo jab

The pneumonia vaccine (also called a pneumococcal or pneumo jab) is a one-off jab that helps protect against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia. You qualify for a free jab if you're 65 or over.

Contact your GP to get the jab or to check if you've already had it.

Restock your medicine cabinet

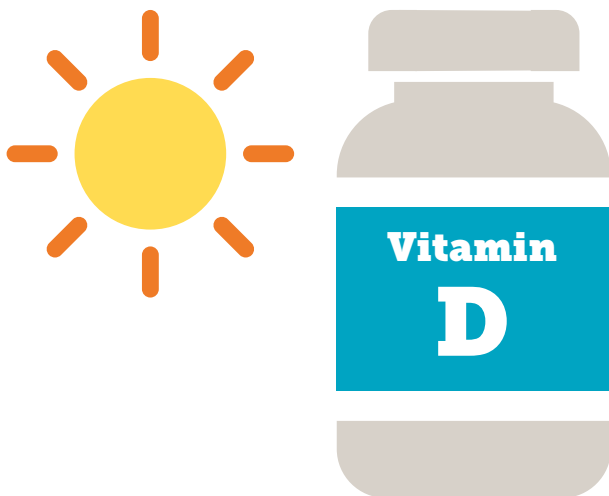
Keep a range of everyday medicines at home in case you get ill, such as your usual painkillers, cough medicine, lozenges and sore throat sprays. Ask your pharmacist for advice if you're unwell. Some GP surgeries and pharmacies have a minor ailment scheme. This may help you to get medicine for some minor illnesses for free if you don't normally pay for prescriptions.

Ask your pharmacy if they offer a home delivery service for your repeat prescriptions too. This can be helpful in cold weather or if you're unable to leave the house. You can also order repeat prescriptions online and get them delivered to you ([nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/pharmacies/how-to-order-repeat-prescriptions-online](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/pharmacies/how-to-order-repeat-prescriptions-online)).

Get enough vitamin D

Lack of sunshine in winter can mean you don't get enough vitamin D, which can make you feel tired. The main source of vitamin D is sunlight, but you can also get it from oily fish (such as salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines), eggs, red meat, liver, margarine and some cereals. However, it's difficult to get enough vitamin D from food alone.

The Department of Health and Social Care recommends that all adults consider taking a daily vitamin D supplement from October to March. People at risk of vitamin D deficiency may need to take a supplement all year round. Speak to your GP or pharmacist for advice.

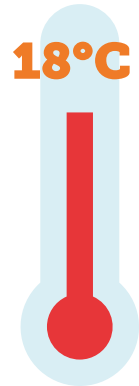


3 Keeping your home warm



Check the thermostat

Being cold isn't just uncomfortable – it can also be very bad for your health. Low temperatures increase the risk of flu, as well as a heart attack, stroke or hypothermia. Heat your home to at least 18°C (64°F) during the day and night. Turn up your thermostat if you feel cold.



Check your boiler

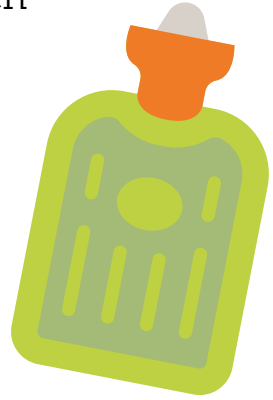
Get your boiler serviced every year. It's best to do this ahead of winter, to make sure it doesn't break down when you need it most. To find a gas engineer, contact the Gas Safe Register ([0800 408 5500, gassaferegister.co.uk](https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)). If you rent, check if your landlord has arranged this.

Keep warm at night

A hot water bottle or electric blanket can warm up your bed. Never use both together, as this can be dangerous. Check whether you can keep your

blanket on all night or should switch it off before you get into bed.

Get your blanket checked every three years by an expert. Ask about this at the shop where you bought it or contact your local council's trading standards department – they may even run free testing days. If your blanket is more than 10 years old, consider replacing it.



Keep your bedroom window closed at night when it's cold. Low temperatures can raise your blood pressure and put you at risk of a stroke or heart attack.

Simple tips to keep your home warm

- Draw your curtains before it gets dark to keep the heat in, and consider getting thermal or heavy ones to keep your room warmer.
- Shut your doors to keep heat in the rooms.
- Don't block your radiators with furniture – keep them clear so heat can circulate.
- Put draught excluders around doors and windows.

Contact Simple Energy Advice ([0800 444 202](tel:0800444202), simpleenergyadvice.org.uk) for more tips.

Get your home insulated

Insulating your loft and cavity walls and fitting a jacket to your hot water cylinder can make your home much warmer and reduce your bills. Read our factsheet **Paying for home maintenance and repairs** to find out more about home insulation and whether you can get help to pay for it.

Apply for a grant to make your home warmer

You can get support to make your home more energy efficient. This will make it feel warmer and may reduce your fuel bills too.

You could qualify for help with insulating your home through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme. You may also get help with repairing your boiler or heating system, or replacing your window glazing if you:

- receive certain benefits or you're on a low income
- can't afford your heating or other energy bills
- are vulnerable to the effects of a cold home.

Contact Simple Energy Advice (**0800 444 202**, **[simpleenergyadvice.org.uk](https://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk)**) to find out if you're

eligible for the ECO scheme. If you don't qualify, you can still check with your energy supplier or your local council to see if you can get help in other ways.

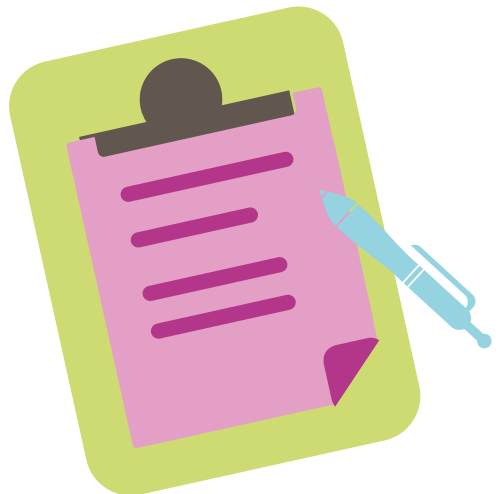
Join the Priority Services Register

Make sure you've signed up to your energy supplier's and network operator's Priority Service Register if you:

- are above State Pension age
- are disabled
- have a long-term illness, or sight or hearing loss
- are in a vulnerable situation.

This gives you free support and services – for example, you might be given advance notice of power cuts or offered alternative heating facilities if your supply is disrupted.

Suppliers and network operators offer different help, so contact both to find out what they provide.



4 Making winter more affordable



Claim the money you're entitled to

Most people who are of State Pension age will get a Winter Fuel Payment of between £100 and £300 by the start of every year. Call the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on **0800 731 0160** or visit [gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment](https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment) for more information.

If you get Pension Credit, you should automatically get a Cold Weather Payment of £25 each time the temperature in your area is at 0°C (32°F) or below for seven days in a row between 1 November and 31 March.

You may qualify for a one-off discount on your electricity bill if you receive Guarantee Pension Credit or you're on a low income, even if you use a pre-pay meter. Contact your energy supplier to check if they are part of the scheme, or the Warm Home Discount Scheme to find out more (**0800 731 0214, [gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme](https://www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme)**).

Pension Credit can top up your weekly income. If you're a carer or receive certain disability benefits, you may qualify for higher rates of Pension Credit. For more information about rates, see our guide **Pension Credit**.

Call us on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a full benefits check, or try our online calculator (independentage.org/benefit-calculator).

Check you're on the best fuel tariff

Switching supplier can be the best way to save money and may be easier than you think. Visit our website for information on how you might be able to save money by switching to a new energy supplier (independentage.org/get-advice/money/saving-money/switching-energy-supplier).



If you're not online, call one of the Ofgem-accredited energy switching companies for advice – for example, Uswitch (**0800 6888 557**, uswitch.com) or Citizens Advice (**0800 144 8848**, energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk).

Get help if you're in debt

If you're struggling to pay your energy bills, contact your supplier to set up a repayment plan. Charis Grants can direct you to sources of financial help with fuel bills ([01733 421 021](tel:01733421021), charisgrants.com). Simple Energy Advice also has an energy grant finder (simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/grants).

For free, independent advice about debt, contact the debt charities National Debtline ([0808 808 4000](tel:08088084000), nationaldebtline.org) or Stepchange ([0800 138 1111](tel:08001381111), stepchange.org).



Our practical, jargon-free advice guides give you the information you need to get the most out of older age.

To find out about our full range of guides and order copies, call 0800 319 6789 or visit independentage.org/publications

We want the UK to be the best place to grow older and we have ambitious targets to increase the number of older people we help and the difference we make. We receive no state funding and rely on income from individuals, trusts and other sources to continue providing our services to hundreds of thousands of older people in need.

Visit independentage.org to make a secure online donation and find out about other ways to support us. Alternatively, you can call us on 020 7605 4223 or email supporters@independentage.org



About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

For more information, visit our website **independentage.org**

Call us for information or to arrange free, impartial advice from an adviser. Lines are open 8.30am – 6.30pm Monday to Friday. Freephone **0800 319 6789** or email **advice@independentage.org**



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