Keep Out The Cold

A Help the Aged advice leaflet
Keeping warm is an important part of keeping safe and well, both during the winter months and the rest of the year. Sadly, though, fuel bills can be a worry for many older people. This leaflet suggests things you can do that will help you keep warm, make the best use of the heat you pay for and hopefully save you some money.

**Keeping yourself warm**

**Eat for warmth**

Eating properly plays a big part in keeping warm and well – during cold weather, regular hot meals and hot drinks will provide warmth and energy. Even if you don’t feel like cooking, try to have at least one proper meal a day. Potatoes, beans, bread, milk, eggs, meat and fish are all good sources of protein, energy and vitamins which will help keep you healthy. It is also a good idea to eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Stock up on some basic foods so you don’t need to go out to the shops on very cold days. For more ideas on eating well, see Help the Aged’s free advice leaflet “Healthy Eating”.

**Keep moving**

Many people find that it gets more difficult to keep warm as they get older. However, any kind of activity, from walking to the shops to doing the hoovering gets your circulation going and makes you warmer. So try not to stay sitting down for long stretches – get up and move around a bit – to music if you feel like it! If you have difficulty walking, even moving your arms and legs and wiggling your toes and fingers will help. If it is very cold outside or icy underfoot try to keep active indoors rather than venturing outside.
Dress for warmth

Wrapping up warmly, both indoors and out, is very important. Several layers of thin clothing, for example a shirt or blouse, thin jersey and cardigan will keep you warmer than one thick jumper. The layers will help keep you warm by trapping air between them. Clothing made from natural fibres, such as wool, is usually warmer than man-made fibres. Warm underwear, such as long sleeved vests and long johns, can help beat the chill and is becoming more popular with all age groups! Warm thick tights or long socks are a must, as well as a warm pair of slippers. Some women find trousers can be warmer than a skirt. When sitting down, a shawl around the shoulders or a blanket over the knees will provide a lot of warmth.

When you go out, be sure that you are dressed for the weather; it is very easy to just throw your coat on when you go to the shops, only to realise on the way that it is colder than you thought. In winter make sure that you have enough warm layers on under your coat, and wear gloves and a hat or headscarf; this is very important as a lot of your body heat is lost through your head. A scarf tucked into your coat collar will protect you from draughts and help keep your neck and ears warm. Warm shoes or boots are also important; if there is room inside them you could add a fleecy insole or another pair of socks for extra warmth. Try to avoid getting wet. If you can't avoid it, get out of the wet clothes as soon as you get back indoors.

Keep warm at night

It is very important to keep warm in bed at night. A hot water bottle will warm your bed up, as will an electric blanket. Never use the two together though as this can be very dangerous. Wrapping up warmly for bed is as important as wrapping up to go outside – thermal underwear or pyjamas, bed socks and even a night cap will all help keep you warm right through the night. A warm milky drink before bed can also help, and if you sometimes wake up in the night feeling cold, you could keep a flask of hot drink on the bedside table too. Try and make sure that you have enough bed clothes. Finally, however much you like fresh air, in very cold weather it is advisable to keep your bedroom window closed!
Keeping the house warm

One of the best ways of increasing your comfort and keeping bills down is to make your home more ‘energy efficient’. There are two sides to energy efficiency. One is keeping the heat in and draughts out by insulating and draughtproofing your home. The other is making good use of your heating and getting full benefit from your fuel. By keeping you warmer and saving you money, energy efficiency is good news all round!

Before carrying out any energy efficiency measures it is wise to get advice on what measures would benefit your property most and whether you can get any assistance with the cost.

The Energy Saving Trust can give you free advice about ways to save energy and money in your property; to speak to an adviser phone 0345 277 200. You can also speak to a local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on 0800 512 012; they will know of any local initiatives to help people save energy in their homes.

You can find information on the main grants available to improve the energy efficiency of your home, on pages 8 to 12 of this leaflet.

Keeping the heat in

Insulation

When you insulate your home, you help keep the heat you pay for inside your house. Heat will always escape to the outside, flowing through the walls, ceiling, windows, doors and floor, but when you insulate you slow down this escape.

There are two areas where insulation is particularly important. Insulating your hot water tank is quick and easy – you can buy a special jacket to fit around it which will stop a lot of heat from escaping. Slowing down
the rate of heat loss means that your hot water will stay at the right temperature for longer and so the water heating won’t have to be used so much. It is well worth fitting a jacket to your tank – it can save you pounds.

Heat rises, so a lot of heat can be lost through your roof. You can cut down this heat loss by insulating your loft. This is usually done by laying a thick layer of material between the wooden joists in the loft.

When you insulate the loft, it is a good idea to insulate any pipes that are up there, both to help stop heat being lost and to prevent frozen pipes in very cold weather.

The cold water tank should also be insulated to stop it freezing over in winter. When the loft has been insulated this becomes more likely as the loft itself is no longer being kept warm by escaped heat!

There are other things that you can do to insulate your home that won’t cost you much money. A lot of heat is lost through the windows, but you can reduce this. Double glazing a window cuts the heat loss, but double glazing is an expensive option. However, you can ‘double glaze’ your windows yourself by attaching plastic film or sheeting to the window frame. This can range from fixing cling film to the window frame with double-sided tape to buying a piece of stiff plastic sheeting which can be fixed to the window frame with Velcro or double-sided tape and which can be used year after year.

Curtains will also insulate your windows. For the most benefit, shut your curtains just before it gets dark. Heavy, lined curtains will stop heat escaping. Ideally, curtains should reach right down to the ground or to the window sill. This traps a layer of air between the glass and the curtain which gives added insulation and stops draughts creeping in through the gaps. If you have radiators under your windows, don’t let the curtains hang in front of them – tuck them behind the radiator so that the heat flows into the room. A heavy curtain at the front door will also help stop heat escaping.
Draughtproofing

A curtain at the front door and heavy, well-fitting curtains at the windows not only provide insulation but can also cut down on draughts. Gaps and cracks around windows and doors, or around the skirting boards, can cause draughts which can make you feel cold and uncomfortable.

Badly-fitting doors and windows also mean that you waste a lot of heat and money, so it is well worth draughtproofing your home.

Draughtproof your windows by sealing the gaps around the window frames and between the frame and the part of the window which moves. Draughtproofing strips can also be fixed around the sides of the doors, and draught excluders fitted to the bottoms of doors where there are often gaps. Avoid using ‘loose’ draught excluders as it is very easy to trip over them – it is much safer if the draught excluder is firmly fixed to the bottom of the door itself. To cut draughts even further you can even buy letterbox and keyhole covers!

It is most important to draughtproof the front and back doors, where most heat is lost, but you can also draughtproof some of the doors inside the house as this can help stop heat escaping from warm rooms into cold areas. Finally, gaps between floorboards and around the skirting boards can be sealed with plastic filler or wooden beading.

Other insulation measures

If you have some money to spend, you might be thinking about insulating your home even more. These measures will make your home more comfortable and cut your heating bills, but as they are more expensive to install they will not ‘pay for themselves’ as quickly as insulating your hot water tank and loft will.

- Cavity walls are made up of two layers of building materials (usually bricks). Cavity wall insulation involves injecting
insulating material into this gap.

- The **insulation of solid walls** is carried out by adding an extra layer of insulation either to the inside or the outside of the wall.
- Installing permanent **double glazing** will cut down on heat loss and 'cold spots' by the windows and will also reduce noise from outside.

Although expensive, these options can also be very effective. It can be worth adding extra insulation if work needs doing anyway. For example, if your windows need replacing because the wooden frames have rotted, it would be worth replacing them with double glazed windows.

Most draughtproofing and insulating materials are available from DIY stores. But first check with your local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre or Energy Saving Trust to see if there is any help available with materials or cash. See page 4 for their details and pages 8 to 12 for details of grants to help with improving energy efficiency.

**Ventilation**

If you are insulating and draughtproofing, it is important to make sure that some fresh air can still get into your home, so that you have enough ventilation. Ventilation is important for three main reasons.

- For your health and comfort – you need fresh air in the home.
- To help prevent condensation – if moist air can’t escape from your house then you could end up with condensation and dampness.
- Gas fires and heaters, and coal fires, need supplies of fresh air so that the fuel can burn properly and so that dangerous waste gases like carbon monoxide can escape.

Some rooms have airbricks or ventilator grilles which give background ventilation without draughts. **Never** block these up.