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.

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.

Date of publication: September 2013 © Age UK 2013
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Free thermometer

Turn to the middle for your pull-out thermometer
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. As we get older, our bodies respond differently to the cold and this can leave us more vulnerable in cold weather. 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 that are more common in the colder months, such as chest infections, heart attacks and stroke. 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 22-25). 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 22).

This guide is applicable across England and Scotland. In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI and in Wales, contact Age Cymru for their versions of this guide (see page 22). In Scotland, contact Age Scotland for a copy of their free Hot Tips Calendar (see page 22).

Key

This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland.

This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.
With a little preparation we can help ourselves to stay healthy, safe and as comfortable as possible this winter.
Preparing for winter

Getting ready for the cold weather – which can start as early as October – means that you’re more likely to keep warm and well. Here are some things you can do to stay safe and ward off the winter chills.

• Have your heating system serviced and your chimney swept, or ask your landlord to do this if it’s their responsibility.

• If you have wood-burning, coal or gas heaters, make sure there’s adequate ventilation. Never block air vents, and get your boiler serviced every 12 months by a gas engineer.

• Check with your energy supplier for further advice to help you prepare for winter. Our free guide Save energy, pay less has tips about insulating and draught-proofing your home.

• If water pipes freeze they can burst, so you need to be able to turn off the water at the main stopcock. Make sure you know where your main stopcock is and check that it’s easy to turn. If it’s jammed, you may need to get it replaced.

• Have your electric blanket serviced – this should be done at least every three years.

• Make sure that your smoke alarm is working. You can ask your local fire service to check your home for fire safety. It’s free and you may be eligible to get free smoke alarms fitted.

• Install an audible carbon monoxide alarm in each room that has a gas appliance.

• Make sure 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. Some councils provide free bags of the mix, if you or someone else can pick them up. Otherwise you could try a local DIY store.

• Consider fitting a grab rail if you have steps at your front or back door. Ask your local Age UK for more information.

• Keep simple cold, flu and sore throat remedies in the house. Your pharmacist can make suggestions and 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 your home.

• Keep basic food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it’s too cold to go shopping. You could also do your food shopping online and get it delivered to your door.

• Eat healthily and keep as active as possible.

• Ask your family, neighbours or friends if they could call or visit you more often if a period of cold weather stops you getting out and about.

• Keep a battery-operated radio, torch and spare batteries handy in case severe weather causes a temporary power cut. Keep your mobile phone, laptop or tablet fully charged, so you can use the battery power if there’s no electricity.

• Keep a list of emergency numbers, such as your utility companies, by your phone. You could add the number of your local Age UK (see page 22).
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 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. 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 are helpful if walking is difficult, along with moving your arms and legs and wiggling your toes.

Eat well
Hot meals and drinks help to keep you warm, so eat at least one hot meal each day 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. It’s important to eat enough, especially in winter. If you’re worried about a poor appetite, speak to your GP. 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 a jab every year, using the latest vaccine. Flu is not only unpleasant, it can also develop into pneumonia, which can be serious.

Your jab will be free if:

- you’re 65 or over
- you receive Carer’s Allowance or are the carer for an older person whose welfare will be at risk if you fall ill
- you have a condition such as diabetes, a chronic heart, lung, kidney or liver problem, or Parkinson’s, or if you have had a stroke.

It takes up to ten days for the vaccine to take effect, so it’s best to have it early on in the winter. 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. Speak to your GP about getting a flu jab.

**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 free NHS Smokefree Helpline (see page 25). If you live in Scotland call Smokeline (see page 25).

**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 a radiator or other source of heat. 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 – have a look at the 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 warm**
Cold weather can make you more vulnerable to some illnesses so it’s vital for your health that you stay warm during the cold winter months. Read the sections ‘Keeping your home warm’ and ‘Keeping warm indoors and out’ to find out more (see pages 12 and 14).
Keep your spirits up
It’s not unusual to feel a bit down in winter – particularly when the days are short and it can get dark by 3.30pm. Try to keep to your usual routine and if you can’t visit friends or family, make sure that you phone or Skype 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, if it’s not too cold, or at least go outside while there is daylight. 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.

For more information on keeping healthy, see our free guides Healthy living and Healthy eating.

*It helps to do something you enjoy every day. If possible, go for a short walk, or at least go outside while there is daylight.*
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 some time before someone could come 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 keep 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 your home warm

Most of us spend a lot of time indoors in winter, so it’s important that you are comfortable and safe there. And it’s essential that you keep your home warm. Low temperatures increase the risk of flu and other respiratory problems and can raise blood pressure. Blood pressure takes longer to return to normal in older people after being out in the cold and this puts us at greater risk of heart attacks and strokes. The colder your home, the higher the risk to your health.

• The recommended temperature for your main living room is around 70°F/21°C, and the rest of the house should be heated to at least 64°F/18°C. We have included a thermometer in the middle of this guide for you to pull out and keep. You can use it in your living room (ideal temperature 70°F/21°C) and in your bedroom (ideal temperature 64°F/18°C) to keep you warm in winter. If you feel cold, turn the heat up regardless of what the thermometer reads.

• 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. If you have individual thermostats on your radiators, make sure they’re set at the right temperature in the rooms where you spend time.
• 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. Test your carbon monoxide alarms. If you don’t have any alarms, you need to get one fitted in each room that has a gas appliance, as there is a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if air vents become blocked.

• Contact your local Age UK for a benefits check and advice on any other financial support you may be eligible for. If you’re having difficulty paying your heating bills, Charis Grants can direct you to grants to help with utility debts (see page 22).

The recommended temperature for your main living room is around 70°F/21°C. If you feel cold, turn up the heat regardless of what the thermometer reads.
Keeping warm indoors and out

You’re at risk of a heart attack, 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.

- Keep your bedroom window closed at night when the weather is cold. Low temperatures raise blood pressure which takes longer to return to normal in older people. This puts you at greater risk of a heart attack or a stroke.

- Make sure you keep your hands and face warm. If they get cold they can trigger a rise in blood pressure which puts you at risk of a heart attack. As well as wearing gloves and a hat, always wrap a scarf around your face when you go out in cold weather, even for short intervals. This helps to warm the air you breathe.

- Several thin layers of clothing will keep you warmer than one thick layer, as the layers trap warm air. Clothes made from wool or fleecy synthetic fibres such as polyester are a better choice than cotton. Start with thermal underwear, warm tights or socks.

- If you’re 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 dangerous. Check whether your electric blanket can be kept on all night or whether it’s 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 (they may charge). 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. As we get older, it’s harder to notice if our body temperature is dropping and it takes longer to warm up.

• Keep your feet warm. As with your hands and face, cold feet can trigger a potentially dangerous rise in blood pressure. Choose boots with non-slip soles and a warm lining, or wear thermal socks. These type of boots keep you safe if the ground is slippery and keep your feet warm.

• If you get wet when you’re outside, change into dry clothes as soon as you go back indoors.

• Check local news and weather forecasts for advice when bad weather is forecast, or visit the Met Office website at www.metoffice.gov.uk
What extra money could I be eligible for?

Many of us worry about rising fuel costs, so it’s important to make sure you’re not missing out on any benefits or discounts you’re entitled to that will help you keep your home warm.

Most people born before 5 January 1952 are entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment in 2013–14 to help with heating costs. This is a tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 paid to you between November and December. Previous recipients should get the payment automatically, but if this is the first year that you are eligible, contact the Winter Fuel Payments helpline (see page 25) to ensure that you don’t miss out.

If you receive Pension Credit, or certain other benefits, you’re automatically paid a Cold Weather Payment when the temperature is at 0°C (32°F) or below for seven days in a row.

You may be entitled to a Warm Home Discount on your electricity bill if you receive Pension Credit or if you’re on a low income. It’s a one-off discount usually made between October and March. Check with your energy supplier or ask an advice agency such as Age UK. Find out more at www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

Contact your local Age UK to arrange a benefits check (see page 22) or use our online benefits calculator – go to www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck. See our free guide More money in your pocket: a guide to claiming benefits for people over pension age.
Heating your home efficiently

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

• Draught-proof doors and windows, insulate the loft, lag the hot-water tank and pipes, and consider getting cavity-wall insulation. These measures will help to keep your home warm and your 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 23 and 24).

• 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 23).

• Ask your energy supplier about their Priority Services Register, a service for older and disabled people. Services include the option of having bills in Braille or large-print text and (if you meet certain criteria) free annual gas safety checks and alternative facilities for cooking and heating if your energy supply is interrupted.
• Green Deal is a new scheme that lets you take out a loan to make energy-efficiency improvements to your home. You then pay back the loan over time through your electricity bill. It’s important to check exactly how the scheme works before signing up to it, and carefully consider what it involves before taking it on. For more information call the Energy Saving Trust (see page 23) or in Scotland, call Home Energy Scotland (see page 23). See our free factsheet Help with heating costs for more detailed information.

• You could be eligible for financial help from the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) scheme if you’re on a low income, receive certain means-tested benefits such as Pension Credit, or live in a home that would be costly and difficult to make more energy efficient. To find out whether you’re eligible, call the Energy Saving Trust (see page 23). In Scotland, to find out about this and a similar Home Energy Efficiency Programmes scheme, call Home Energy Scotland (see page 23).

• Check your current energy tariff and shop around to see if you can get a better deal. See our free factsheet Switching energy supplier for more information. 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.*

*Age UK Energy is a trading name of Age UK Enterprises Limited (the commercial services arm of Age UK, which donates net profits to that charity. Registered in England and Wales number 3156159). Address: Tavis House, 1–6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. E.ON Energy Solutions Limited, registered office: Westwood Business Park, Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8LG (registered in England and Wales number 3407430).
• Contact your energy supplier if you’re having trouble paying your bills. Companies should not disconnect all-pensioner households during the winter months. See our guide *Managing your money* if you want to find out more about budgeting.

For more information on getting support to keep your home warm see our free factsheet *Help with heating costs*. In Scotland, for a similar version of this factsheet contact Age Scotland (see page 22). 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’re worried about being disconnected because you can’t pay your energy bills, contact your energy supplier straight away. To get advice contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (see page 23).
Many of us worry about rising fuel costs, so it’s important to make sure you’re not missing out on any benefits or discounts you’re entitled to.
Spread the Warmth this winter

Winter can be especially hard for older people. 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. We believe that this must change. We are providing specialist information and advice like this guide and working with local Age UKs to deliver practical services like home visits, befriending and emergency grants.

Through our campaign for warm homes, Age UK is calling on politicians to invest the billions of pounds the government is already raising in carbon taxes to make millions of homes much more energy efficient.

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. To find out how you can add your voice visit www.spreadthewarmth.org.uk
Useful organisations

Age UK
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
Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.
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 022 3444
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
Directs people to grants to clear utility debts owed to certain energy providers.

Tel: 01733 421 021
Email: admin@charisgrants.com
www.charisgrants.com
Citizens Advice Consumer Service
A consumer advice and complaints service.
Tel: 0845 404 0506
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer_service

Energy Saving Trust
Provides free advice on saving energy.
Tel: 0300 123 1234
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

In Scotland, contact Home Energy Scotland
Tel: 0808 808 2282
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland

Gas Safe Register
You can check if an engineer is on the register by visiting the website.
Tel: 0800 408 5500
If you suspect a gas leak, call 0800 111 999
Email: enquiries@gassaferegister.co.uk
www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Gov.uk
The government website of services and information that includes advice on taking care of yourself in winter.
www.gov.uk

Green Deal
Government scheme that lets you take out a loan to make energy-efficiency improvements to your home.
www.gov.uk/green-deal-energy-saving-measures
**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  
Textphone: 0800 027 2122  
www.homeheathelpline.org.uk

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

Tel: 01392 885680  
www.metoffice.gov.uk

**NHS 111 / NHS Direct**
NHS 24-hour helpline for advice on urgent but non-life-threatening symptoms. Calls to 111 are free from landlines and mobiles.

NHS 111 is replacing NHS Direct in England and has been available for most people from April 2013. If NHS 111 hasn’t reached your area yet, call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

In Scotland, contact **NHS 24**
Tel: 0845 424 2424  
www.nhs24.com
**NHS Choices**
Provides information about NHS services, healthy living and health conditions.

www.nhs.uk
In Scotland, visit www.nhsinform.co.uk

**NHS Smokefree**
Provides help and advice to stop smoking

Tel: 0800 022 4332
www.smokefree.nhs.uk

In Scotland, call **Smokeline**
Tel: 0800 84 84 84
www.canstopsmoking.com

**Ready Scotland**
Provides useful tips on getting ready for winter.

www.readyscotland.org/are-you-ready/winter-weather/winter-at-home
www.readyscotland.org/are-you-ready/severe-weather

**Winter Fuel Payments helpline**

Tel: 0845 9 15 15 15
www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment
How you can help to Spread the Warmth

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

Just £5 could fund 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 make their home comfortable in winter.

Or, working with local Age UKs, £5 could 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.

Age UK is a registered charity, registered charity no 1128267 and registered company no 06825798.
Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: RSXZ-KTTS-KSHT, Age UK, Tavis House, 1–6 Tavistock Square, LONDON WC1H 9NA. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/donate. If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

Personal details

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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)

Expiry date / Issue no. (Maestro only)

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 according to data protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity number 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.
Health & wellbeing

You may be interested in other guides in this range

• Bereavement
• Going into hospital
• Health services
• Healthy eating
• Healthy living
• Managing incontinence
• Staying cool in a heatwave
• Staying steady

To order any of our free publications, please call Age UK Advice free on:

0800 169 65 65
www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing
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/spreadthewarmth

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

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

• Healthy living
• 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.