Winter wrapped up
A guide to keeping well, warm and in touch with other people

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:

- Claiming benefits: a guide for people over State Pension age
- Save energy, pay less
- Staying safe

Age UK 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/Age Concern* are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on 0800 169 65 65.

*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is 207–221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ. Age Concern England (registered charity number 261794) and Help the Aged (registered charity number 272786), and their trading and other associated companies merged on 1 April 2009. Together they have formed the Age UK Group, dedicated to improving the lives of people in later life. 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 and Age Cymru. ID9584 09/10
This information guide has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be useful. Nothing in this guide should be construed as 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. Age UK does not accept any liability from its use. We aim to ensure that this 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, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK.

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.
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British Gas
Looking after your world

British Gas has been working with Age UK (as Help the Aged) for 11 years on a range of initiatives for people in later life. Over £27m in additional benefits are being claimed by older people through our Benefits Advice Programme; over 10,000 homes have received HandyVan services and ‘Safe at Home’ packs through our ‘Here to HELP’ programme. We are proud to be able to continue our sponsorship.
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. This leaflet 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.

You will find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice: for contact details see ‘Useful organisations’ (pages 14–16). Contact details for organisations near you can usually be found in your local phone book, and your local Age UK/Age Concern* should be able to help (see page 14).

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

Key

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 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 you have adequate ventilation.
• Check with your energy supplier for further advice to help you prepare for winter.
• Check your water stopcock is working properly.
• Have your electric blanket serviced – this should be done at least every three years.
• Make sure your smoke alarm is working.
• Make sure you claim all the financial support you can to help with heating bills. Your local Age UK/Age Concern can advise you.
• Be sure 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 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.
• Keep basic food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it’s too cold to go shopping.
• If you smoke, think about trying to stop.*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to 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 Concern 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 Concern 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.’
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.

Stay moving
Keeping active generates heat and helps to keep you warm. It’s good for general fitness and wellbeing too. 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 a hot drink in a flask by the bed are good ideas too.

Have a seasonal flu jab
If you’re over 65 be sure to 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 with a condition such as diabetes, a chronic heart, lung, kidney or liver problem, have Parkinson’s or have had a stroke.

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. If you have a lung condition, you’ll quickly notice your breathing is easier and doing any exercise is more comfortable. Ask at your GP practice about NHS services to help you give up.

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. Your feet, fingers, nose and earlobes are particularly vulnerable. You may also be susceptible to chilblains if you have circulation problems. 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 when 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, make sure you phone them regularly for a chat. It helps to 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, it’s very important to share these feelings with someone, perhaps a friend or 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, and always wear gloves and a hat when you go out.

• 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. 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. This keeps your feet warm and keeps you safe if the ground is slippery.

• Keep steps and paths free of ice. 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 UK/Age Concern 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

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 recommended temperature for rooms you use during the day is 21°C (70°F), but you might be more comfortable heating your rooms at a higher temperature. It’s so important to keep warm as you are at risk of 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 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.
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 a Gas Safety Registered engineer.

• Draught-proof doors and windows, insulate the loft and lag the hot-water tank and pipes. This helps keep your house warm and bills down. You may be able to get financial help to do this. The Energy Saving Trust can advise you (see page 14).

• Grants from the government and energy suppliers to help heat and insulate your home may be available if you are over 60. 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 (see page 16).

• 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, and if you are eligible for free energy efficiency and insulation.

• Most people over Pension Credit age 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 (see page 16).

• If you receive Pension Credit or certain other benefits, 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 UK/Age Concern to arrange a benefits check (see page 14).

See our free guides Claiming benefits: a guide for people over State Pension age and Claiming benefits: a guide for people of working age for more information.
Spread the Warmth this winter with Age UK

Winter can be especially hard for many older people. Age UK has 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 believes 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 British Gas, 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.

Can you help?

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 find out more visit [www.spreadthewarmth.org.uk/donate](http://www.spreadthewarmth.org.uk/donate) or see the back page of this booklet.

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.
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

In Wales, contact
Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65
www.agecymru.org.uk

In Scotland, contact
Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732
www.agescotland.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact
Age NI: 0808 808 7575
www.ageni.org.uk

Directgov
Includes advice on taking care of yourself in winter

www.direct.gov.uk

Energy Saving Trust
Call 0800 512 012 to be put through to your nearest centre.

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, 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

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 42424 if you live in Scotland (NHS 24).

**Warm Front**
Provides grants for insulation and heating improvements for people in England.
Tel: 0800 316 2805
www.warmfront.co.uk

**Similar schemes run across the UK:**
If you live in Wales, contact the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES):
Tel: 0800 316 2815
www.heeswales.co.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
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 80 80 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:  
Address:  
Postcode:  
Tel:  
Email:  

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)  
Signature X

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

Notes

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.