

# Winter wise

Ways to look after yourself  
during the coldest months



## Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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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. This guide has tips on staying healthy and safe, as well as information about the help available with higher winter fuel costs.

In this guide you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or visiting [independentage.org/publications](https://independentage.org/publications).

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](https://independentage.org/staying-well-in-winter).

# 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 respiratory 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. You should avoid scratching at your skin, and they should clear up on their own in two to three weeks.

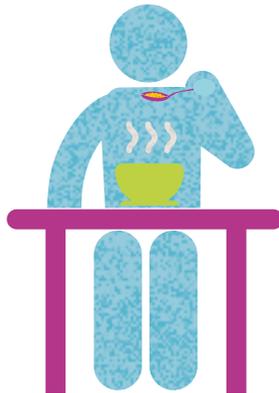
# Take care when going outside in icy weather

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 has an Eatwell Guide that 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)).



## 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 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.

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



# 2 Staying healthy



## Changes to services during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

You can still get help and advice from your GP or pharmacist but there may be changes in how you access it – call your GP surgery or contact them via their website, rather than going there in person.

### 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, a carer, or have certain health conditions such as diabetes or asthma. For the 2020/21 flu season it will be available for free to more groups of people, including those aged 50 to 64 and households of people on the shielded patient list.

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

**Flu jabs and pneumo jabs do not protect against coronavirus.**

## Restock your medicine cabinet

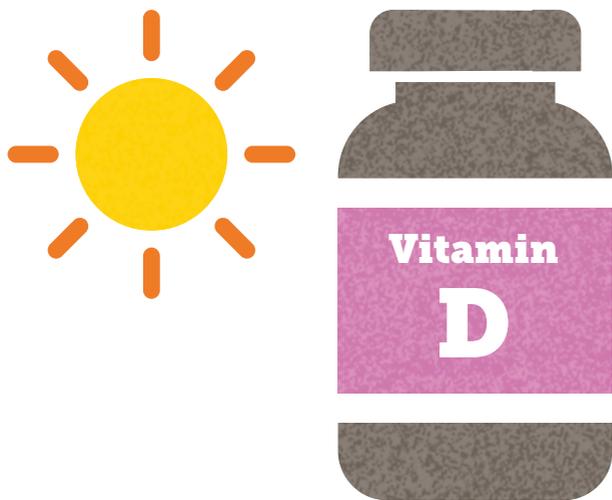
Keep a range of everyday medicines at home in case you get ill, such as your usual painkillers, cough medicine, lozenges and sore throat sprays. Ask your pharmacist for advice if you're unwell. Some GP surgeries and pharmacies operate a minor ailment scheme, which may enable you to get medicine for some 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 especially helpful in cold weather or if you're unable to leave the house during the coronavirus pandemic. 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 higher risk of vitamin D deficiency may be advised to take a supplement all year round. Speak to your GP or pharmacist for advice.

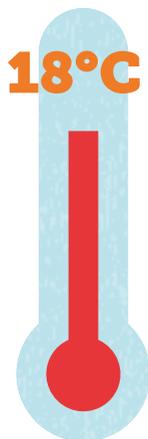


# 3 Keeping your home warm



## 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 annually 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](http://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.

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, [simpleenergyadvice.org.uk](http://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

There is support available to make your home more energy efficient, which will make it feel warmer and reduce your fuel bills too. You could be eligible 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 own or privately rent your home, receive certain benefits, are in fuel poverty or live on a low income and are vulnerable to the effects of a cold home.

A new Green Homes Grant has been set up to help people fund eco-friendly home improvements. You may be eligible for help with energy-saving measures, such as wall and underfloor insulation.

Contact Simple Energy Advice ([0800 444 202](tel:0800444202), [simpleenergyadvice.org.uk](http://simpleenergyadvice.org.uk)) to find out if you're eligible for either the ECO scheme or the Green Home Grant. If you don't qualify, you can still check with your energy supplier to see if you can get help in other ways.

## Join the Priority Services Register

If you're above State Pension age, disabled, have a chronic illness or sight or hearing loss, or are in a vulnerable situation, make sure you've signed up to your energy supplier's and network operator's Priority Service Register. 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 born on or before 5 October 1954 will get a Winter Fuel Payment of between £100 and £300 by 13 January 2021. 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.

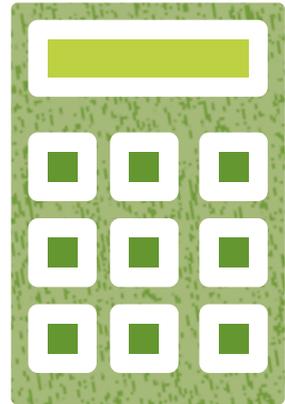
You may qualify for a £140 one-off discount on your electricity bill if you receive Guarantee Pension Credit or you're on a low income, even if you use a pre-pay meter. Contact your energy supplier to check if they are part of the scheme, or the Warm Home Discount Scheme to find out more (**0800 731 0214, gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme**).

Pension Credit can top up your weekly income if it's below £173.75 for a single person, or £265.20 for a couple (rates apply until April 2021). These figures may be higher if you're a carer or receive certain disability benefits. For more information, see our guide **Pension Credit**.

Call us on **0800 319 6789** for a full benefits check, or try our online calculator ([independentage.org/benefit-calculator](https://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](https://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](https://uswitch.com)**).



## 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](https://charisgrants.com)). Simple Energy Advice also has an energy grant finder ([simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/grants](https://simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/grants)).

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



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The information in this guide applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru  
(0800 022 3444, [ageuk.org.uk/cymru](https://ageuk.org.uk/cymru))  
for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland  
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In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI  
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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.

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## About Independent Age

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

For more information, visit our website **[independentage.org](http://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](mailto:advice@independentage.org)**



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