

AGE
Concern



FIGHT THE FREEZE
A GUIDE TO KEEPING
WARM AND HEALTHY

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EVEN IF YOU'RE ON A BUDGET WINTER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE MISERY.

Age Concern have produced this booklet to help you stay safe, warm and well this winter. As well as money-saving tips and advice on fighting the freeze, there is information on extra benefits and grants you can claim, and other help you may be entitled to.

Staying healthy in winter is all about looking after yourself - something that too often gets overlooked if you're trying to economise. As you prepare for winter, it's vital to:

KEEP WARM

make sure your house is warm, and you're dressed properly

KEEP SAFE

keep your wits about you and be prepared for the unexpected.

KEEP HEALTHY

eat a balanced diet, and stay active

KEEP A CHECK ON BENEFITS

if you're over 60 you may get extra money towards heating bills, and could qualify for other benefits too

KEEP IN TOUCH

with your friends and family.

Age Concern can provide information and practical support to help you fight the freeze in all sorts of ways. Read on to find out how.

www.ageconcern.org.uk/fightthefreeze

I. KEEPING SAFE AND WARM

This section gives some ways you can make your home more comfortable during the cold winter months, and how you can be prepared for unexpected events – like power cuts.

CHECK YOUR HEATING IS WORKING PROPERLY.

If all the adults in your home receive the state pension, or are chronically sick or disabled, you can register as a Priority User with your electricity or gas supplier to receive free safety checks.

CHECK FOR DRAUGHTS AROUND THE HOUSE.

Fitting draught proofing around doors and windows may well pay for itself by saving you money on heating bills.

IS YOUR LOFT INSULATED?

This is another inexpensive way to cut your heating costs. Even a layer of cardboard can stop heat escaping through the roof. Lagging your hot water tank and pipes helps too.

If you need help doing any of these things, your local Age Concern will usually have a list of trustworthy tradesman or a Handy Person Scheme. To find your nearest Age Concern call our Information Line free on 0800 00 99 66.

You may be entitled to a Warm Front grant which will help with your insulation costs. For more information see page 9.

KEEP YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU

Make sure you check people really are who they say before you let them into your home. If you need to get repairs done, use a reliable tradesperson, and agree a price before they begin work.

BE PREPARED

Power cuts have been in the news recently, and severe winter weather can make disruptions in your supply more likely. If your lights do go out, hopefully your supplier will sort out the problem quickly. But it's worth bearing a few things in mind just in case.

- A torch and spare batteries, candles and matches.
- Food that doesn't need cooking or heating (crackers, tinned meat, fish and fruit).
- Important phone numbers – some are on the back of this booklet; with space to add your own.
- Freezers can be useful in winter too, but remember not to re-freeze food once it has thawed.

HELP WITH BILLS

If you dread opening your gas or electricity bill why not consider spreading the cost of winter throughout the year. Your energy company will have a payment scheme which lets you do this.

If you find you are unable to pay a bill, let your supplier know as soon as possible. And make sure they know you are a pensioner – gas and electricity companies will not disconnect supply to all-pensioner households in winter. If you need more independent advice on meeting payments call the Age Concern information line.

Your local Citizen's Advice Bureau will also help. They can negotiate directly with fuel companies on your behalf, or check up on meter readings if you think you have been overcharged.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Age Concern Factsheet Number 1: Help with heating

2. KEEPING HEALTHY

Looking after your health is vital in the cold weather. If you keep active and eat well, your body will be much better equipped to fight the freeze.

KEEP ACTIVE TO KEEP WARM

Staying active has many benefits. Household chores become easier; you will be less likely to get sick and will bounce back again much faster.

Remember that if you are over 65 you can get a free flu jab from your GP. Other 'at risk' groups, such as people with asthma, heart disease or with lowered immunity also qualify. Contact your surgery to make an appointment.

Doing some gentle exercise every day will help keep you warm. As well as generating heat while you are doing it, exercise can improve your circulation, balance and flexibility. As you get stronger and fitter you will find that doing things like getting up from a chair, or out of the bath, become easier.

Many local Age Concerns run exercise classes for older people. Or you can try the simple exercises on the next page at home. There are more ideas for exercises in Age Concern Factsheet 45.

- Remember to slowly increase your activities each day. Stop and check with your GP if at any point you feel unwell, develop sudden pain or shortness of breath.

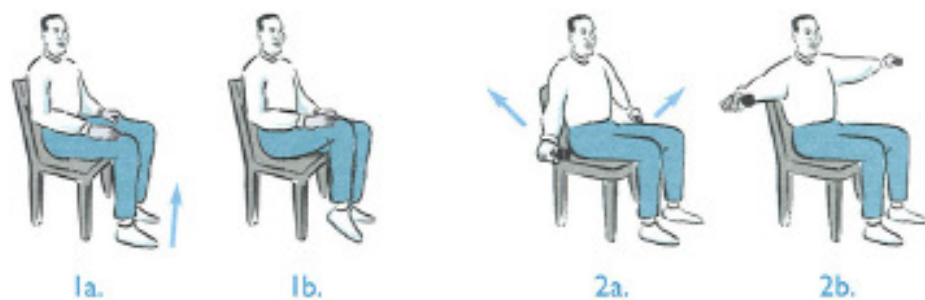
EXERCISES TO STAY FIT DURING WINTER

In winter you may not feel like walking far, and if it's icy outside you certainly won't want to leave the house without good reason. The exercises given below will maintain your fitness through the winter.

1. Sitting leg lifts – these will strengthen your thigh muscles and make your knees more flexible. Best of all you can do it while watching TV!

Sitting in a chair (**1a**), lift your foot up from the floor, as high as is comfortable (**1b**), then slowly lower it down again. Count to three as you lift your leg and again as you lower it. Try to do this ten times, with one leg then the other. Once you can manage this comfortably, repeat, starting with the first leg.

2. Arm raises – will increase your upper body strength. Sit in an upright chair that supports your back, with your feet flat on the floor and shoulder width apart (**2a**). Let your arms dangle by your side, then slowly lift them until they are level with your shoulders (**2b**), and lower them slowly again. Try to repeat this ten times. Once you can manage this easily, try doing it with a small bottle of water in each hand.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Age Concern Factsheet 44: NHS services for older people
Age Concern Factsheet 45: Staying healthy in later life

FOOD FOR WARMTH

Plan ahead to eat well through the winter. A varied diet that is high in carbohydrate – bread, potatoes, pasta or rice – will ensure that your body has enough energy to fight the cold. Fruit and vegetables contain vitamin C, which will help ward off any infections and illnesses that might come your way.

Try to avoid eating too many sweets or biscuits. The sugar they contain will pick you up quickly but wear off just as fast – leaving you feeling tired again. Bananas are a perfect snack food for winter as they release their energy gradually over a couple of hours, warming you up and sustaining you during cold weather.

Remember to keep your store cupboard stocked up with essentials and try to eat at least one hot meal each day – even if it's just soup. Regular hot drinks will help keep out the cold too.

STORE CUPBOARD STAPLES

- **Milk:** long-life, dried or evaporated milk, tinned milk puddings.
- **Meat and fish:** tinned corned beef, ham, sardines, pilchards or tuna.
- **Drinks:** cocoa, malted milk and meal replacement drinks (Complan etc).
- **Fruit and veg:** tinned fruit and vegetables, baked beans and other beans and pulses, dried longlife fruit juice, instant mashed potato.
- **Cereals:** breakfast cereals, crackers or plain biscuits, pasta and rice.
- **Other:** tinned and packet soups, Marmite or Bovril, stock cubes.

Drinking enough is important too, especially if you are doing exercise. As you get older you will not always feel thirsty when your body needs water. Try to drink at least eight glasses of liquid each day – if you find drinking water difficult, remember that squash, juice and tea all count towards this amount.

3. KEEP A CHECK ON BENEFITS

If you are over 60, you could be entitled to extra benefits to help with heating costs or making your home more energy efficient.

WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS

If you're living at home you are entitled to extra money during the winter (currently £200, with an extra £100 in households where someone is 80 or older). You should get this automatically if you are over 60 on the qualifying date this year. If you have not received the payment by December call **08459 15 15 15**. Have your pension book or National Insurance number ready when you call.

PENSION CREDIT

This new benefit replaces the minimum income guarantee (MIG) from October 6. Some people who did not qualify for MIG may now be able to get Pension Credit.

To apply call: **0800 99 1234**.

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

£8.50 a week is paid automatically to people getting Pension Credit when the temperature falls below freezing for seven days.

WARM FRONT GRANTS

People on income-related benefits can apply for money towards home insulation, or a central heating system. Call **0800 316 6011** for more details.

CRISIS LOANS

They are available in exceptional circumstances. Call the winter warmth advice line on: **0800 085 7000** for more information.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Age Concern Factsheet 18: A brief guide to money benefits

4. KEEPING IN TOUCH

During winter your family and friends can form a vital support network for you. It's important to stay in touch with them. Keep an eye out for your neighbours too.

If you want to extend your circle of friends or try a new activity, why not find out what your local Age Concern has to offer. You might be able to join an exercise class or a computer group – or just drop in for a cup of tea and a chat.

Age Concerns also provide vital services to the local community. Many have day centres and lunch clubs, and/or they can arrange home visits and transport services for older people. Contact yours to see what they can offer.

To find out more about your local Age Concern call our Information Line on: **0800 00 99 66**.

If you are having problems coping at home, you can speak to your GP or to social services. Once you have been assessed, you may be able to get extra help – such as a home help or meals on wheels.

You can contact social services through your local county council, district council or city hall.

MORE WAYS TO FIGHT THE FREEZE AT HOME THIS WINTER:

- **Keep your cupboard well stocked** in case bad weather or illness stops you getting out to the shops (see page 8 for more help with this).
- **Try to keep your main living room at around 20°C** during the day.
- **Get your electric blanket tested.** Age Concern offers free testing and replacement of faulty blankets in November. Call **08457 00 99 66** to make an appointment at your nearest testing centre.
- **During cold spells, prepare a thermos with a hot drink** and keep it by the bed in case you wake up feeling cold in the night.
- **Wearing lots of layers will keep you warmer than one thick layer.** Most body heat is lost through the head, so if you get cold during the day, or at night, pop a hat on.
- **Try to spread household tasks throughout the day,** so you can balance rest and activity.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The **Age Concern Information Line** is a free helpline for older people, their friends, families and carers. They will give advice over the telephone, send out Factsheets and provide more detailed advice on individual cases where necessary. You can order up to five Factsheets free of charge. Freephone: **0800 00 99 66**.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Age Concern Information Line:
0800 00 99 66

7am – 7pm seven days a week.

Energy Efficiency advice line:
0800 512 012

Free advice on energy saving and information on local energy efficiency schemes and grants.

Winter Warmth Advice line:
0800 085 7000

8am – 8pm Monday to Friday.

NHS Direct:
0845 46 47

Advice on what to do if you're unwell (as well as how to stay healthy) 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Warm Front grants:
0800 316 6011

Find out if you are eligible for money for insulation and heating.

For more information and links:
www.ageconcern.org.uk/winter

Keep warm, Keep well provides more ways to stay warm in winter from the Department of Health. Freephone: 0800 085 7000 for your copy.

OTHER USEFUL NUMBERS

AGE
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