ENERGY PROJECTS PLUS
towards a sustainable future

Winter Warmth & Wellbeing

Keeping warm is crucial to keeping well through Winter. In this guide we'll discuss some of the key themes to consider.

Why are cold homes so unhealthy?

There are two major issues with cold homes, being:

1) Low Temperatures Themselves

We're burning calories constantly. During the colder months, our bodies will burn even more calories to keep us warm. Those calories have to come from somewhere, and often our bodies will sacrifice other essentials in order to keep us warm.

Therefore, it's vital that we eat enough food, and ideally, we eat hot food to help our bodies maintain a higher temperature. Plenty of hot drinks will help, too.

If our homes are cold, and our bodies are working extra hard to keep us warm, we become more susceptible to the seasonal colds, flu & Covid, because we don't have the spare calories to fight off infections. In extreme cases, people can succumb to hypothermia.

2) Condensation, Damp & Mould

Condensation occurs where damp air settles on a cold surface. This can happen anywhere in your home, but some areas most prone to it are the inside of bedroom windows (we exhale a litre of water vapour in our sleep every night), bathrooms and kitchens (due to the excess moisture caused by bathing and cooking), and any 'cold spot' in a home, e.g. a south-facing room with multiple external walls.

If condensation is allowed to settle, it's the perfect breeding ground for black mould, the spores of which can exacerbate respiratory conditions, and in extreme cases, can cause death. If you see any black mould in your home, you can take a photo to show an energy advisor, but then it's important to wipe it away without delay.

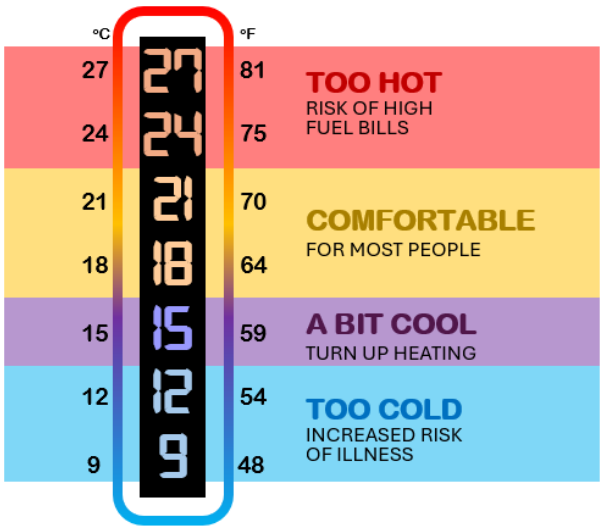
What do we mean by "low temperatures?"

If we're moving from room to room, and undertaking activities such as cooking and cleaning, we'll generate lots of body heat, and therefore don't need the rooms we're in to be too warm. We recommend heating all the rooms in your home to some extent, as often as possible, to stave off condensation, but usually this only needs to be around 10ºC (50ºF) in a typical home, with average humidity.

The areas of our home we're most concerned about are our "living areas" where we tend to spend the most time awake and inactive. E.g. this might your lounge, where you're spending hours binging the latest TV series, or you could be reading in the sitting room, knitting in the conservatory, or piecing together a jigsaw on the dining room table.

Once the sun sets and temperatures drop, we need these areas of our homes to be warm enough to ensure we continue to feel well.

For *healthy adults*, we recommend these rooms maintain a temperature of 18-21ºC. If you can't afford 18-21ºC, then 15-17ºC is acceptable, particularly if you're able to snuggle under a throw (heated or otherwise), and/or you have a good dressing gown and fluffy slippers.



But it's important to keep in mind that not everybody is a *healthy adult*. The following groups are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cold homes, and we would recommend they turn their thermostats up to ensure they're able to achieve temperatures of 21-23ºC in their living areas:

Elderly People

Once we reach 70 years of age, we don't generate body heat as well as we did when we were younger, so it's important to add a little extra warmth.

Babies in Cots

A baby can't run around, generating body heat. They spend most of their time wherever they've been placed. Therefore the room they're in needs to be warm enough so they can burn all their calories growing, not keeping warm.

Pre-school toddlers

While toddlers can run around, generating body heat, there's a massive link between cold homes and childhood asthma/pre-school wheeze. If the temperature can be raised, then hopefully the inhaler can be neglected.

Short-term mobility issues

If you've sprained your ankle, or broken your leg, you'll need to burn your calories mending yourself, not keeping warm. Therefore, if you can turn the thermostat up, you'll hopefully get your cast off more quickly.

Patients with health conditions

Anybody suffering with respiratory, or cardiovascular, or immunosuppressing, or mobility-limiting health conditions/disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cold homes, and require additional heat to help them feel warm and well at home.

This doesn't need to be a chronic condition. If you've come down with a cold, turning up the temperature could help you beat it quickly!

Winter wellbeing Top Tips

As the evenings draw in, it's a good idea to consider how best to tackle the upcoming Winter. Here are some suggestions that have been around for as long as any of us can remember:

- Eat regular meals (preferably hot)
- Drink plenty of warm drinks
- Make sure to move around regularly, even if it's just to pop the kettle on again

"Housewarming"

- Be sure to use all your heating controls, e.g. set your heating to come on 30 minutes before you usually wake up, and switch off at least 30 minutes before you go to bed.
- If your radiators have any cold-spots, they may need bleeding.
- Having your heating appliances serviced each year is a great way to ensure they're working at their best.
- For every draught, there's draught-proofing.

"Heat the Person" Top Tips

So long as you're able to ensure your rooms don't develop condensation and mould, you can focus on keeping yourself warm:

- Wrap up – dressing gowns and fluffy slippers might not be considered elegant garments, but they're great at keeping you warm
- Thermal underwear is maybe worth investing in, if you'd rather keep your wrapping-up under wraps.
- Oil-filled radiators can be a great way to provide extra warmth, relatively cheaply. If you plug one in near where you're sat, they can provide a decent level of warmth fairly quickly, so you can switch them off again, once you've taken the chill off the room.
- Throws and electric heated throws are great to keep you feeling warm on the sofa
- Electric blankets, self-heating mattress toppers, and winter duvets can all help ensure you feel warm in bed.