



# Winter Wise

Keep Warm

Keep Well

Keep Safe

Advice on looking after yourself over the winter months

## Winter can be a difficult time of the year for many of us.

Cold temperatures can make us vulnerable to illness and the darker nights and icy weather can make it more difficult to get out and about.

This guide has been produced to help you prepare for the winter weather and to help you stay as safe and healthy as possible.



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## Keep Healthy

### Eat well

Eating regular meals will help keep your energy levels up during winter. Hot meals and drinks help keep you warm, so eat at least one hot meal a day and have plenty of hot drinks.

Plan your meals and keep your diet as varied as possible. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables to boost your immune system. Stock up on tinned and frozen foods, so that you don't have to go out too much when it's cold or icy.

Drink more milk and eat more dairy products – these boost your immune system and help prevent colds.

### Beat the Blues

With shorter days and bad weather, it's very easy to sit in the house and not get out and about. This can have an impact on your mental health so it's important to find ways to beat the winter blues.

Sunlight helps improve your mood so when the weather is good go for a walk or sit near natural light. If you feel completely overwhelmed, organisations such as Lifeline or Samaritans are there to help.

## Get your flu jab

Have a flu jab every year. It's free for pregnant women, young children, people aged over 65, and those in at-risk groups. Flu is more than just a bad cold and can increase your risk of more serious illnesses such as pneumonia. 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 jab (or pneumococcal) jab is a jab that protects against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia. You're eligible for one if you're 65 or over. Children under two years old are vaccinated as part of the NHS childhood vaccination programme.

## Restock your medicine cabinet

Keep a range of everyday medicines at home in case you get ill, such as paracetamol, ibuprofen, cough medicine, lozenges and sore throat sprays.

Ask your pharmacist for advice and let them know about medications you take which may interact with over-the-counter remedies.



## Visit your pharmacist

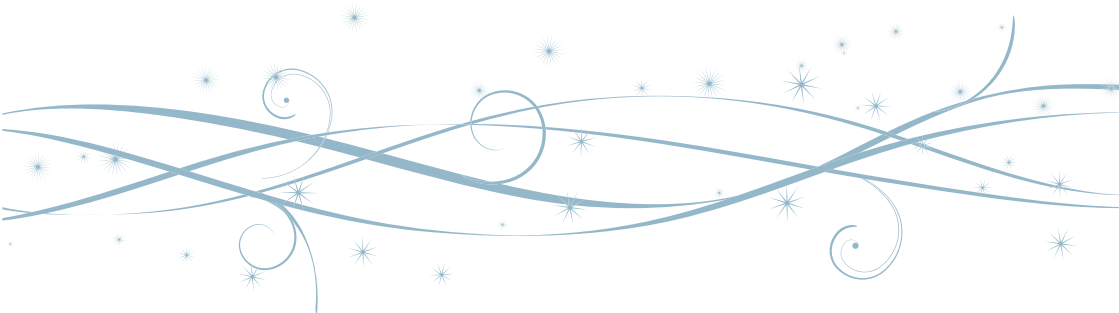
Your pharmacist is a great source of advice if you're feeling unwell - you don't have to make an appointment. Ask your pharmacy if they offer a home delivery service for your repeat prescriptions as this can be especially helpful in cold weather. Pharmacists and their teams also offer healthy lifestyle advice that covers topics such as healthy eating, physical activity, managing medication, losing weight and stopping smoking.



## Get enough vitamin D

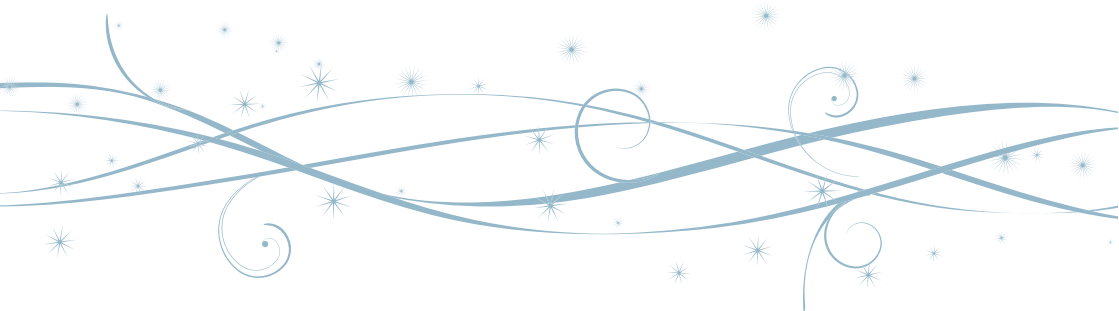
Lack of sunshine in winter can mean you don't get enough vitamin D which is essential for healthy bones, teeth and muscle. The main source of vitamin D is sunlight but you can also get it from oily fish (such as salmon, mackerel and sardines), eggs, meat, margarine and some cereals and dairy products.

The government recommends the following supplements (table overleaf) for those at risk of vitamin D deficiency:



Who?	How much?
Infants (including breastfed babies) from birth to one year of age unless they are drinking 500ml (1 pint) or more of infant formula each day	8.5–10 micrograms per day throughout the year
Children aged between 1 and 4 years	10 micrograms per day throughout the year
Children aged 5 years and over, and all adults including pregnant and breastfeeding women	10 micrograms per day should be considered from October to March
<p>People who are not exposed to much sun or who cover up their skin for cultural reasons</p> <p>People with darker skin</p>	10 micrograms per day throughout the year

If you are not sure which supplements to take, ask your pharmacist, GP or health visitor for advice.



*Hot meals and drinks help keep you warm, so eat at least one hot meal a day and have plenty of hot drinks*



## Keep Yourself Warm

### Wear warm clothes

Wrap up warm, inside and out. Wear lots of thin layers which will trap warm air between them - clothes made from cotton, wool or fleecy fibres are particularly good and help to maintain body heat. Wear a hat and gloves when you go outside and wrap a scarf around your face to warm the air you breathe in.

### 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 heart attack, stroke or hypothermia. Your living room should be around 70°F (21°C) and your other rooms should be at least 64°F (18°C). Keep your living room warm throughout the day and heat your bedroom before going to bed.

### Keep warm at night

A hot water bottle or electric blanket (but never both together) can warm up your bed. Check whether you can keep your blanket on all night or should you switch it off before you get in and make sure it's safe to use. It is recommended that you get your blanket tested once a year. Keep your bedroom window closed at night when cold - low temperatures can raise your blood pressure and put you at risk of a stroke or heart attack.



# Keep Your Home Warm

## Simple tips to keep your home warm

Draw your curtains before it gets dark to keep heat in (and consider getting thermal or heavy ones to keep your room warmer). Don't block your radiators with furniture – keep them clear so heat can circulate. Fit draught proofing to seal gaps around windows and doors and put draught excluders at the base of doors.

## Get your home insulated

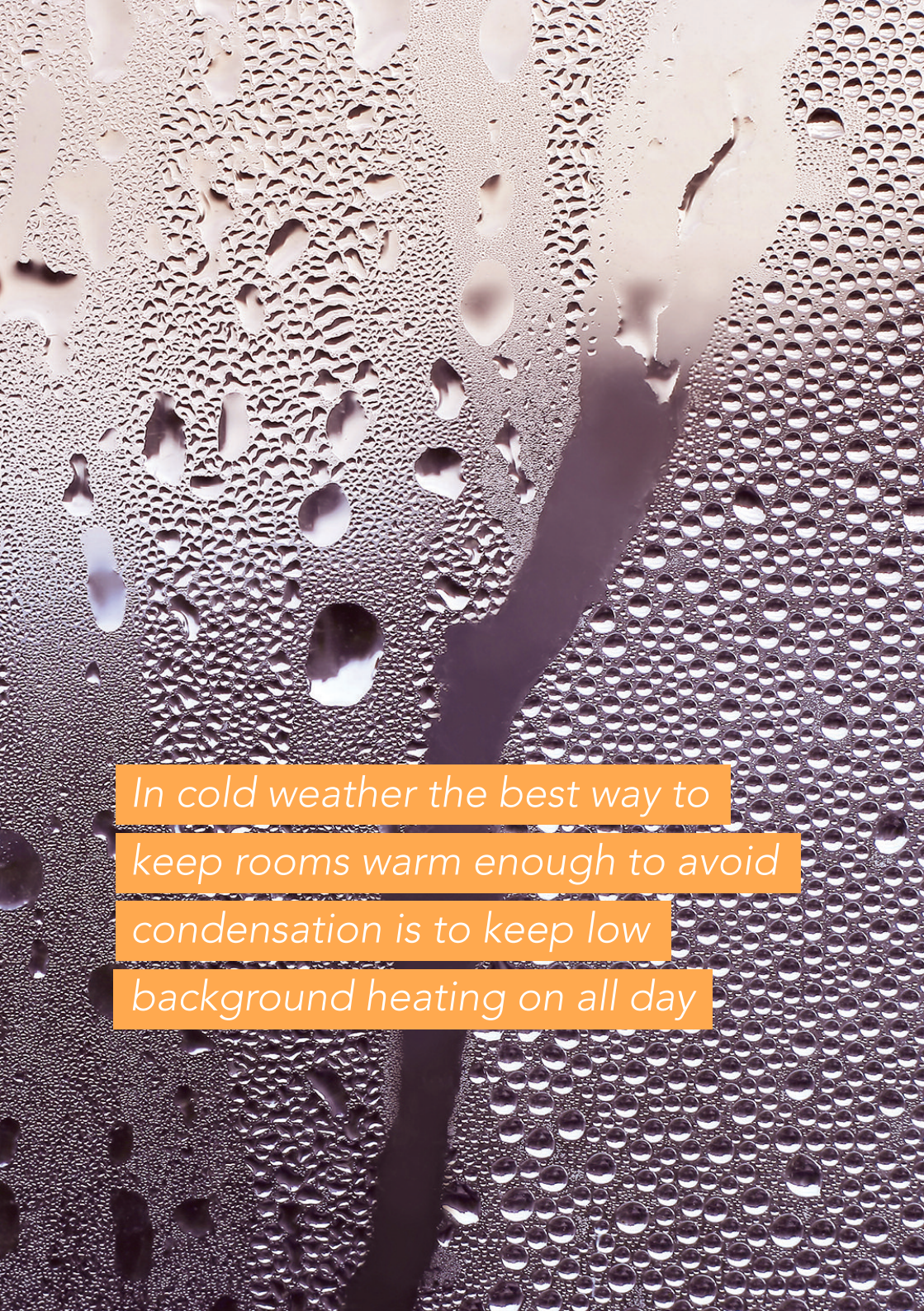
Insulating your loft and cavity walls, fitting a jacket to your hot water cylinder and lagging your pipes can make your home much warmer and save money on your bills.

## Apply for a grant to make your home warmer

There are grants available to make your home more energy efficient, which will make it feel warmer and reduce your fuel bills too. Contact your local Council for advice on grants currently available.

## Bleed your radiators

Maintaining your radiators is important as trapped air or gas prevents hot water from heating your radiator fully. Bleeding radiators is a simple job that you can do yourself,



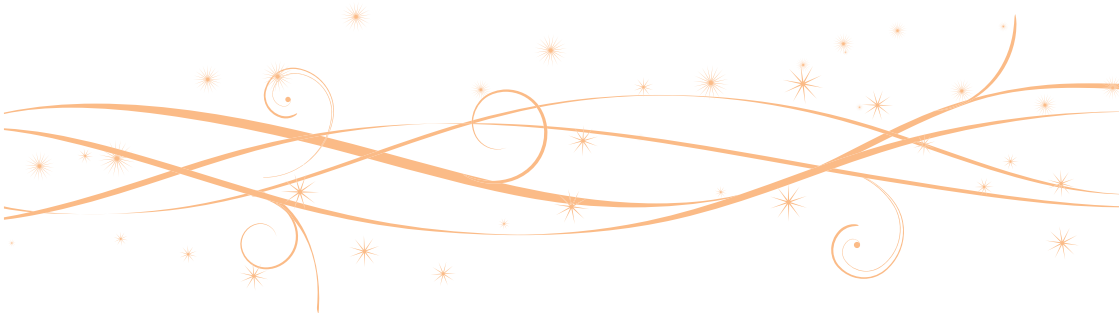
*In cold weather the best way to keep rooms warm enough to avoid condensation is to keep low background heating on all day*

and it can make a real difference to how energy efficient the heating in your home is. Check that your heating system has been serviced.

### **Minimise condensation**

Condensation is particularly common in homes which are poorly heated and poorly insulated and usually gets worse in the colder winter months. It can be minimised by:

- Producing less moisture – keep lids on pots, use extraction fans, try not to dry clothes on radiators, when running a bath put cold water in first, vent tumble dryers to the outside.
- Ventilate to remove moisture – leave trickle vents on windows open, use extractor fans, close kitchen and bathroom doors, open windows, leave space around furniture to allow air to circulate.
- Heating your home a little more - in cold weather the best way to keep rooms warm enough to avoid condensation is to keep low background heating on all day.
- Improving insulation.



## Keep Winter More Affordable

### Claim the money you're entitled to

A Winter Fuel Payment of between £100 and £300 is paid each year to older people who qualify, to help them keep warm in winter (call the Winter Fuel Payments helpline on 03459 15 15 15 if you have not claimed before).



What else may you be entitled to? - With so many unclaimed benefits it is worth finding out if there is extra income available to you by getting a Benefit Entitlement Check. There are a number of local agencies that can help you with this including Citizens Advice and the Social Security Agency.

If you get a qualifying benefit, you should automatically get a Cold Weather Payment of £25 when the temperature in your postcode area is, or is forecast to be, zero degrees or below for seven days in a row.

### Switch your energy supplier

There are five ways to switch which could save you money:

- Switch your supplier;
- Switch your tariff;
- Switch your payment method;
- Switch the way you receive your bills; or
- A combination of all of these.

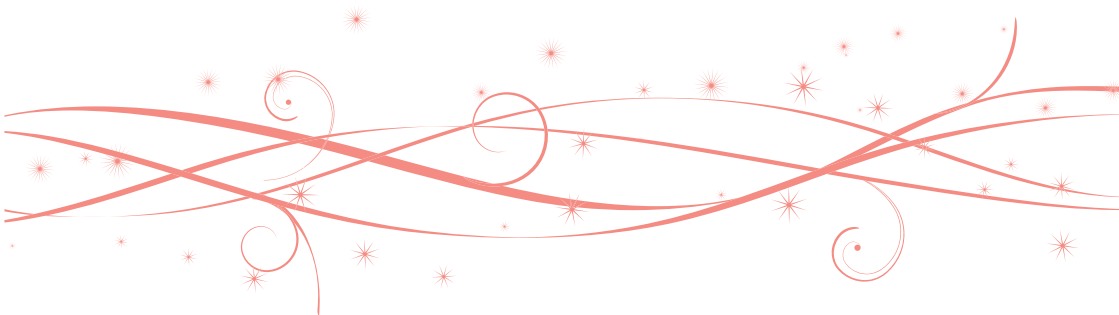
Switching supplier can be an easy way to save money and may be easier than you think. If you're not online, call one of the energy switching companies for advice.

If you don't want to switch supplier there may be ways of saving money just by changing how you pay your bill.

You can check the latest tariffs or can compare energy suppliers using an energy price comparison tool on the Consumer Council website [www.consumerCouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumerCouncil.org.uk) or call 0800 121 6022.

### **Get help if you're in debt**

If you're struggling to pay your energy bills, contact your supplier who must offer to set up a repayment plan or offer you a prepayment meter to help you budget. Remember if you are a pensioner, disabled or chronically sick and live alone or live only with other people who are pensioners, disabled, chronically sick or under 18 you can't be cut off by your energy supplier between October and March. If you're in one of these groups of people, make sure you tell your supplier.



## **Buy Heating Oil Stamps**

Save for your heating oil costs through local Oil/Fuel Stamp Saving Schemes. Pick up an oil stamp savings card at any of the participating retail outlets, buy £5 stamps, place them on the savings card and use as payment or part payment for a fill of oil from a participating oil supplier. Further information on Oil/Fuel Stamp Saving Schemes is available from your local Council.

## **Join an Oil Buying Club**

Why not consider joining a community oil buying club. Everyone within the club pays the same price per litre regardless of the quantity of oil ordered and everyone benefits from the lower prices that can be negotiated by bulk buying. Orders are placed with a community co-ordinator by specified monthly or bimonthly dates.

## **Save money by following some basic tips**

- Switch off appliances rather than leaving them on standby.
- Only fill the kettle with as much water as you need.
- If possible, fill your washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher rather than running them for half loads.
- When replacing household appliances go for A rated ones as they are much more energy efficient.

For further advice on energy efficiency, on grant schemes available or for a FREE Home Visit contact your local Council's Energy Efficiency Adviser.

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it is worth finding out if there is extra  
income available to you by getting  
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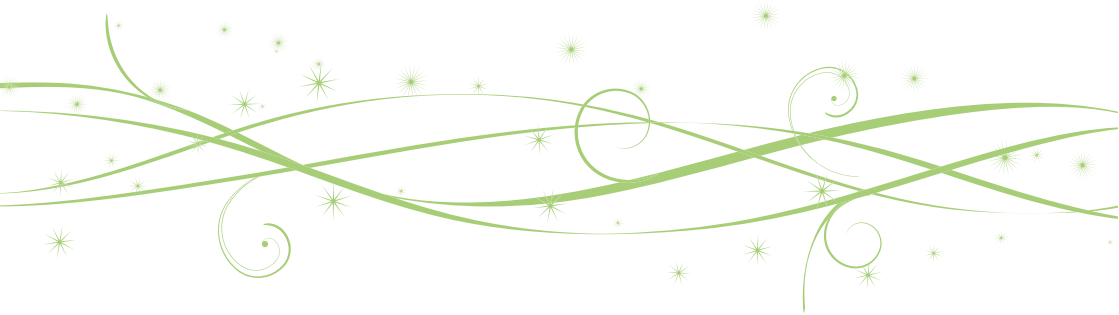


## Keep Active

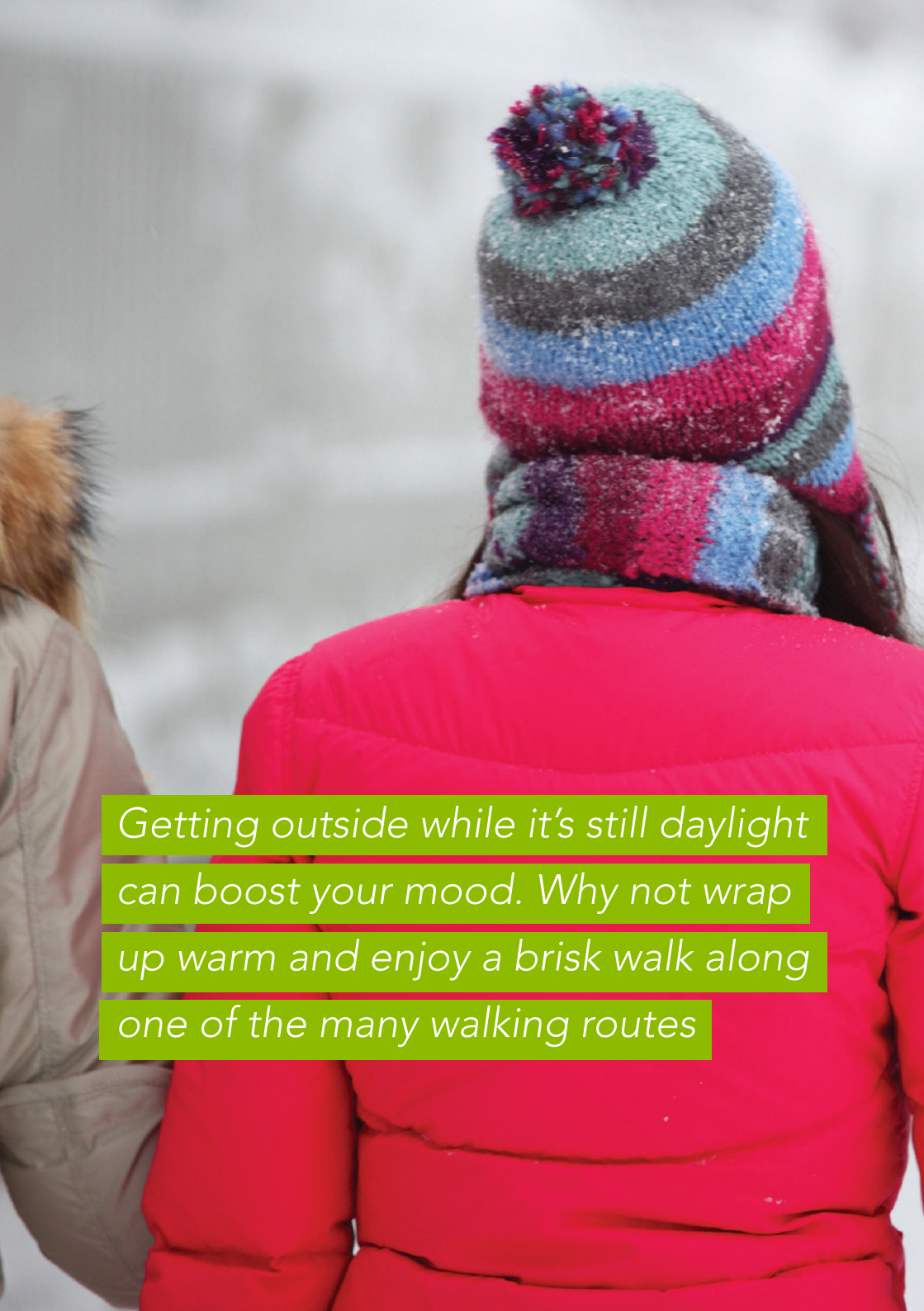
We all know that exercise is good for your overall health – and it can keep you warm in winter. If you can stay active, even moderate exercise can bring health benefits. If possible, try to move around at least once an hour.

Getting outside while it's still daylight can boost your mood. Why not wrap up warm and enjoy a brisk walk along one of the many walking routes or make use of available outdoor gyms. Join a Walking Group for more organised walks.

When you're indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour – get up and walk around. Chair-based exercises and simply moving your arms and legs and wiggling your toes are helpful if walking is difficult. Think about joining a class or club – there are lots of activities available in your local leisure centre and in community centres.







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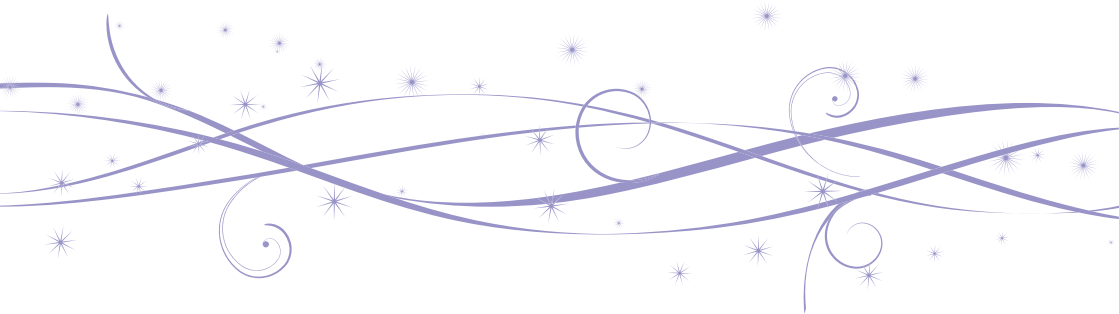
## Keep safe

### Take care when outside

Wear shoes with a good grip to prevent slips and falls when walking outside and wear thick socks to keep your feet warm. Always take a mobile phone with you when outside. Keep grit or salt to put on your path.

### Keep safe on the roads

It's a good idea to have your vehicle serviced before winter starts. Make sure your lights are clean and working, the battery is fully charged, brakes are working well, the wind screen and windows are clean and the washer bottle filled with screen wash. Top up anti-freeze and oil and stock up on de-icer. Tyres (including the spare) should be in good condition, at the right pressure and be at least at the legal tread depth. Inadequate tread will seriously affect your car's traction and steering.



Keep an emergency kit in your car:

- ✓ Tow rope
- ✓ Working torch
- ✓ Warm clothes
- ✓ Emergency rations
- ✓ First aid kit
- ✓ Blanket
- ✓ Hazard warning triangle
- ✓ Shovel
- ✓ Wellington boots

Clear windows and mirrors of ice/snow (and roof if snow) before you set off.

Wear comfortable, dry shoes for driving – snow-covered footwear will slip on the pedals.



Use dipped headlights and reduce your speed – stopping distances are much longer and the chances of skidding much greater. Drive slowly in the highest gear possible and slow down in plenty of time for bends and junctions. Uphill – avoid having to stop part way up by waiting until it is clear of other cars or by leaving plenty of room between you and the car in front. Keep a constant speed, choosing the most suitable gear well in advance to avoid having to change down on the hill. Downhill – reduce your speed before the hill, use a low gear and try to avoid using the brakes. Leave as much room as possible between you and the car in front. If you have to use brakes then apply them gently.

## Carbon monoxide poisoning

Carbon monoxide is a highly poisonous gas produced when appliances which burn gas, oil or solid fuel (coal, wood) aren't fully burning their fuel. This normally happens if they are incorrectly fitted, used or maintained or if vents, chimneys or flues become blocked.

Any of the following could be a sign of CO in your home:

- Flames of a lazy yellow or orange colour on your gas hob, rather than being a crisp blue;
- Dark staining on/around appliances;
- Pilot light that frequently blows out;
- Increased condensation inside windows.

To reduce the risk:

- Ensure boilers, stoves and other appliances are properly fitted and regularly checked and serviced by a competent engineer (gas appliances must be inspected annually).
- Make sure you have adequate ventilation and don't block or build around existing air vents or flues.
- Sweep your chimney regularly.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector and test it on a weekly basis.

If your carbon monoxide alarm goes off or you have symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning (headaches, dizziness, nausea, breathlessness, stomach pain, chest pain, tiredness, loss of consciousness):

**T** – Turn off or extinguish the heating source/appliance  
(if safe to do so)

**A** – Air – ventilate your home by opening windows and doors.  
Stay outside in the fresh air.

**S** – Seek medical help if you feel unwell.

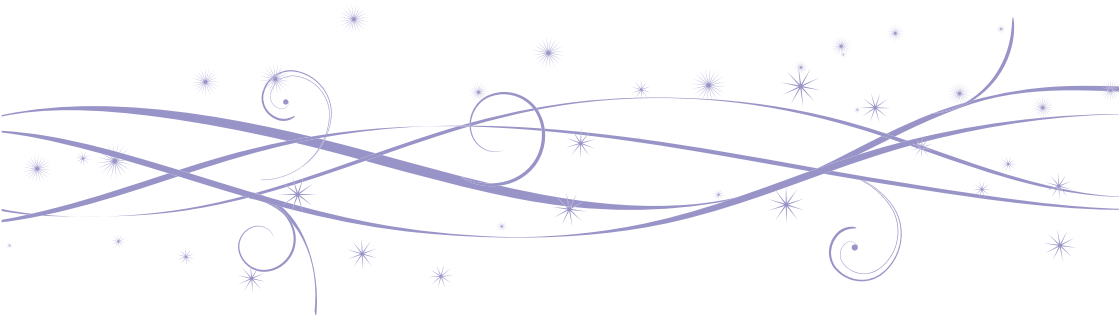
**K** – Keep all heating sources/appliances off until serviced (or  
chimney/flue cleaned) by a qualified professional.

For help with installation or servicing of your appliance contact:

OFTEC NI (Oil Firing Technical Association) Tel: 028 9186 2916

Gas Safe Register 0800 408 5500

NI Association of Chimney Sweeps [www.niacs.co.uk](http://www.niacs.co.uk)

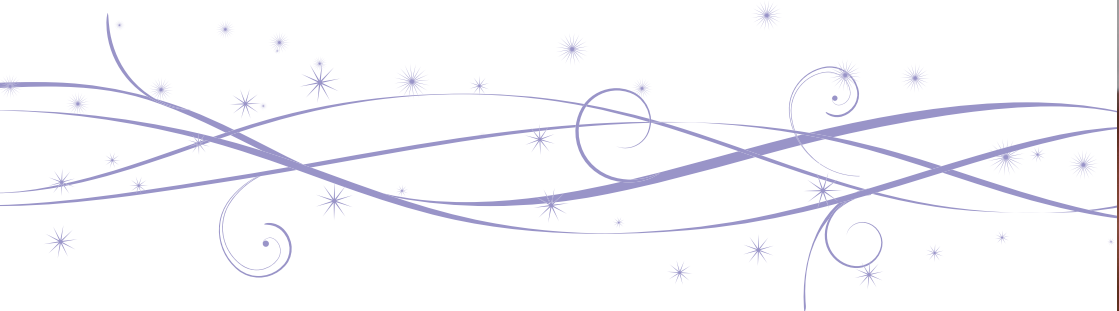


## Fire

Test your fire alarm weekly. Follow a night-time routine – switch off at the wall electrical appliances which are unsuitable to leave running 24/7 and close internal doors. Keep candles away from anything that could catch fire, place them on heat resistant surfaces and blow them out when unattended.

Careless disposal of smoking materials accounts for 50% of accidental fire deaths in Northern Ireland so take care when smoking – always use a proper ashtray, make sure cigarettes are put out properly, never smoke in bed, keep matches and lighters out of reach of children and be careful smoking when drowsy, taking prescription drugs or if you have been drinking alcohol.

For more information on carbon monoxide, home safety or for a FREE Home Safety Check contact the Home Safety Officer at your local Council.





*Test your fire alarm weekly. Follow a night-time routine – switch off at the wall electrical appliances which are unsuitable to leave running 24/7 and close internal doors*

## Keep dry

### Flooding

Our homes are more at risk of flooding during the winter due to increased rainfall and snow and ice melt. It pays to prepare for flooding. If your home is flooded it can be costly, not just in terms of money and time but also inconvenience and heartache. While it's impossible to completely flood-proof a property, there are lots of things you can do to reduce the damage flooding can cause.

Use sandbags at entry points to your property, including outhouses and garages. If sandbags aren't available, use sacks or pillowcases filled with sand or soil. If you live in a high risk area there is also a vast range of flood protection products on the market such as door barriers, airbrick protection, flood boards, drainage pipe valves and other flood barrier systems which you can buy to help protect your property.

Think about your escape route. Make sure you know the quickest way out and, if you keep your windows locked, where the keys are kept. Shut off gas and electricity.

Don't forget about outside – move your car to higher ground, garden furniture to a safe place and protect any chemicals or fuels which could contaminate flood water. Secure your oil tank and unplug any outside electrical appliances.



Once the flood water subsides ensure it is safe before re-entering. Check the electricity and gas is turned off and avoid standing water.

Further advice on flooding is available from your local Council. To report a flood contact the Flood Incident Line: 0300 2000 100.

## **Burst pipes**

Frozen water pipes can cause untold damage to your property and are costly to repair. To minimise the risk of your pipes freezing:

- Insulate your loft and the sides of your water tanks.
- Insulate all your pipes.
- Open the loft trap door on cold days to let heat in.
- If you're away for a while, spending winter somewhere warmer perhaps, then ask a friend or relative to check on your home and make sure pipes haven't burst or frozen.
- Fix dripping taps because if they freeze they'll block the pipe.
- Make sure you know where your stop tap/valve is and that it is working so that you can turn it off easily in an emergency.
- In very cold weather the heating will need to be on low, or set to come on a couple of times a day, especially if you're going away. Leave a key with a neighbour, friend or family member who can check the house regularly and if you're going away for a long time turn off the stop tap/valve.

## Keep useful contact numbers

### ADVICE

Citizens Advice Mid and East Antrim  
T: 028 9600 1333

Citizens Advice Antrim  
& Newtownabbey (Antrim)  
T: 028 9442 8176

Citizens Advice Antrim  
& Newtownabbey (Newtownabbey)  
T: 028 9085 2271

Citizens Advice Causeway  
T: 028 7034 4817

Citizens Advice Mid Ulster  
T: 028 8676 6126

Department for Communities  
Benefit Enquiry Line  
T: 0800 220 674/0800 232 1271

### ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal Welfare Officer  
T: 028 2563 3144

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service  
T: 028 9040 0999

### COUNCIL

Antrim and Newtownabbey  
Borough Council  
T: 028 9034 0000

Causeway Coast and Glens  
Borough Council  
T: 028 7034 7034

Mid and East Antrim  
Borough Council  
T: 0300 124 5000

Mid Ulster District Council  
T: 0300 0132 132

### EMERGENCY SERVICES

Police Service of Northern Ireland  
T: 101  
Emergency: 999  
[www.psnri.org.uk](http://www.psnri.org.uk)

Northern Ireland  
Ambulance Service (Headquarters)  
Emergency: 999  
[www.niamb.co.uk](http://www.niamb.co.uk)

Northern Ireland Fire &  
Rescue Service  
T: 028 9266 4221 (Headquarters)  
Emergency: 999  
[www.nifrs.org](http://www.nifrs.org)

### HOUSING

Northern Ireland Housing Executive  
T: 03448 920900 (Office hours)  
T: 03448 920901 (Emergencies)

### FLOODING

Flood Incident Line  
T: 0300 2000 100

## POWER & ENERGY

NIE Networks Ltd  
T: 03457 643 643  
E: customercontact@nienetworks.co.uk  
www.nienetworks.co.uk

Power NI  
T: 03457 643 643  
E: home@powerni.co.uk  
www.powerni.co.uk

SSE Airtricity  
T: 0345 601 9093  
E: customerservice@airtricity.com  
www.sseairtricity.com

Budget Energy Ltd  
T: 0800 012 1177  
E: talkTOUS@budgetenergy.co.uk  
www.budgetenergy.co.uk

Click Energy  
T: 0800 107 0732  
E: chat@clickenergy.co.uk  
www.clickenergy.co.uk

Electric Ireland  
T: 0345 600 5335  
E: customerservice@electricireland.com  
www.electricireland.com

Firmus Energy  
T: 0800 032 4567  
E: furtherinfo@firmusenergy.co.uk  
www.firmusenergy.co.uk

SSE Airtricity Gas Supply (NI) Ltd  
T: 0345 900 5253  
E: info@airtricitygasni.com  
www.airtricitygasni.com

NI Gas Emergency Line  
T: 0800 002 001

## HEALTH

Antrim Area Hospital  
T: 028 9442 4000

Causeway Hospital  
T: 028 7032 7032

Mid Ulster Hospital  
T: 028 7963 1031

Daldriada Urgent Care  
T: 028 2566 3500

Lifeline  
T: 0808 808 8000

Samaritans  
T: 116 123 (free)

## TRAFFIC & TRAVEL

Travelwatchni  
www.travelwatchni.com

## ROAD GRITTING

Department for Infrastructure  
T: 0300 200 7891  
T: 028 7035 3202 (after hours/emergency)

## WATER

NI Water  
T: 0345 744 0088  
E: waterline@niwater.com  
www.niwater.com

## YOUR CONTACT NUMBERS

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