Independent Age

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# Winterwise

## A guide to keeping well this winter

Supported by
UK Power Networks

## Thank you

We would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed it for us. Our special thanks go to UK Power Networks for their support in the production of this guide.

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# Contents




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We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout. We have changed the names of some of the interviewees who wished to be anonymous. Some of the images seen throughout this guide are posed by friends of Independent Age.

The PIF TICK is the UK-wide Quality Mark for Health Information.

# About this guide

Winter may make it more challenging for us to stay well. As the days get shorter and colder, it's normal to go out less. We're all more likely to catch a cold or flu, and generally feel a bit down. This winter might feel especially challenging because of the cost of living.But, by thinking ahead and planning, we can take care of ourselves and help each other in the coming months.

This guide has tips on how to keep well over winter. We have split it into three sections: Staying warm, Staying safe and Staying well.

You can use our checklists to plan for winter, too. We have checklists on **Winter benefits**, **Preparing for winter** and **Staying well during winter**. Find them at **independentage.org/staying-well-in-winter**, or call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to ask for a copy.

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

“Older people, especially those on fixed incomes, need to know the facts and what help is out there. The cost of living crisis touches all aspects of our lives – health, home, food, energy. By following this guide, we can help ourselves and our friends and neighbours.

# 1. Staying warm

Keeping yourself and your home warm will be a priority this winter. Here's how to stay in control of your money and get the support you're entitled to.

## Important

There is support available if you need help getting essentials, like food, and heating your home this winter. See **page 46** for information about where to get food for free, and **page 11** to find out how to get extra money towards your bills. It's worth talking to your energy supplier, too. A lot of them have grants for people who need help (**page 22**).

## Managing your costs

As the cost of living continues to change, you might want to try to control how much energy you use, or estimate the costs. As a rough guide, the chart on **page 6** shows the relative energy use of different appliances.

The oven and electric hob use the most energy, so you might want to be careful about how you use them. A slow cooker uses the least energy to cook a warm meal. It's okay to use your kettle to make warm drinks, just avoid overfilling it. A lightbulb uses the least energy, and costs less than a penny an hour to run.

## Relative energy use of appliances

| | |
|---|---|
| **Appliances using the most energy** | • Oven<br>• Kettle<br>• Electric hob |
| **Appliances using a moderate amount of energy** | • Vacuum cleaner<br>• Microwave<br>• Toaster<br>• Dishwasher |
| **Appliances using the least energy** | • Washing machine<br>• Slow cooker<br>• Electric blanket<br>• TV<br>• Fridge<br>• Lightbulb |

### Good to know

For advice on how to make your home more energy efficient – for example, by increasing your loft or wall insulation – visit **gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency** or call **0800 098 7950.** In Scotland, contact Home Energy Scotland (**0808 808 2282, homeenergyscotland.org**).

## Keeping yourself 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, a 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.

> “When it gets cold in your bones you're cold from the inside out. Keeping warm is so important, not just for your health but also for your mood.

## Check your boiler

Get your boiler serviced every year. It's best to do this ahead of winter, 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**). If you rent, check if your landlord has arranged this.

It's also important to service your boiler regularly to avoid problems with carbon monoxide. See **page 28** for more information.

## Keep warm at night

A hot water bottle or electric blanket can warm up your bed. Never use both together, because this can be dangerous.

Layering clothes and blankets will keep you warmer, because this traps air between the layers.

If you are using an electric blanket, 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. If your blanket is more than 10 years old, think about replacing it.

## Community warm spaces

Many councils have created community warm spaces. You might also hear them called warm banks. These will be places in your local area where anyone can come in to warm up, and maybe have a cup of tea.

Contact your council to find out if there are any community warm spaces nearby. You can find their contact details at **gov.uk/find-local-council** or call the Local Government Association on **020 7664 3000.**

### Good to know

It might be useful to have another look at your weekly or monthly budget. MoneyHelper has online support to help you do this at **moneyhelper.org.uk/en/everyday-money/budgeting/budget-planner**. If you need some help to make a budget, call Citizens Advice:

- England – **0800 144 8848**
- Scotland – **0800 028 1456**
- Wales – **0800 702 2020.**

## Join the Priority Services Register

Make sure you've signed up to your energy supplier's and network operator's Priority Service Register if you:

- are over State Pension age
- have a disability
- have a long-term illness, or sight or hearing loss
- are in a vulnerable situation – for example, if you have a mental health condition, or would struggle to get to the door in an emergency.

This gives you access to free support and services. You will be given advance notice of planned power outages and you might be offered alternative heating facilities if your supply is disrupted, and other welfare support. You may also be offered yearly gas safety checks on your boiler.

Visit **thepsr.co.uk** for more information and to sign up. Suppliers and network operators offer different help, so contact both to find out what they provide.

## Paying your bills

Here are some ways that you could get help towards your energy costs this winter.

### Important

Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a free benefits check.

> I have a bill for gas and electric that's £139 a month. I have to have the heating on because of my health.

## Pension Credit

Pension Credit is extra money from the government to top up your pension income. It also acts as a passport to other entitlements, such as Cold Weather Payments (Winter Heating Payment in Scotland), Council Tax reductions and help with health costs.

To claim Pension Credit, you must be over State Pension age and on a low income. You can check if you qualify at **gov.uk/pension-credit/eligibility**, or by calling the Pension Credit claim line on **0800 99 1234.**

### Good to know

Our guide **Pension Credit** has more information about how to claim. Call our free Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to order a copy or to arrange a benefits check with one of our advisers.

> "The day I received Pension Credit changed my life. Suddenly I was able to go out and do things.

## Winter Fuel Payment

You may qualify for Winter Fuel Payment if you have reached State Pension age, and lived in the UK during the week of 18 to 24 September 2023. Some people living in certain EEA countries may also qualify.

You'll get between £250 and £600 this winter. This includes the Pensioner Cost of Living Payment (see **page 17** for more information). Most payments are made automatically between November and December. The payment you get is based on your age, whether you receive certain benefits and who you live with.

If you live with someone else who qualifies, the payment is shared between you. The amount is divided depending on both your circumstances – for example, your age and which benefits you're each claiming. Winter Fuel Payment is also tax free.

You should get a Winter Fuel Payment automatically through your State Pension. You will also get it if you're claiming benefits like Pension Credit or Attendance Allowance.

If you haven't received it by 26 January 2024, contact the Winter Fuel Payment helpline on **0800 731 0160.** You only need to claim once – you'll then receive payments automatically every year. Visit **gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment** for more information.

### Cold Weather Payment (England and Wales)

Cold Weather Payments help people on a low income with their fuel costs. You might qualify if you're getting Pension Credit or certain other benefits like Support for Mortgage Interest. You won't get them if you're living in a care home.

Each time the average temperature in your area falls below 0°C for seven days in a row between 1 November and 31 March, you'll receive £25. You should automatically get a payment within 14 working days. This won't affect any of your other benefits.

If you think you should have received a payment but haven't, contact your pension centre.

### Winter Heating Payment (Scotland)

Winter Heating Payment has replaced the Cold Weather Payment in Scotland. It is a one-off payment of £55.05 to people who receive certain benefits, such as Pension Credit. It does not depend on how low the temperature gets.

If you qualify, you should receive it automatically. The next payment is expected to be made in February 2024. Visit **mygov.scot/winter-heating-payment** for more information.

## Warm Home Discount

If you get Guarantee Pension Credit or have a low income, you could also get a Warm Home Discount on your energy bill. The money isn't paid to you, but will be taken off your energy bill by your energy supplier. It is usually worth £150.

To get the discount:

- you must qualify for Guarantee Pension Credit
- you must have your or your partner's name on the bill, and
- your supplier has to be signed up to the Warm Home Discount scheme.

### Good to know

You can check if your supplier is signed up online at **gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme/energy-suppliers** or by calling the Warm Home Discount helpline on **0800 731 0214.**

## Cost of Living Payments

### If you're on a low income

If you get means-tested benefits like Pension Credit (**page 12**), you will get up to three Cost of Living Payments for 2023–24. For most people who qualify, this will mean:

- you should have received £301 in April/May 2023
- you'll receive £300 during autumn 2023
- you'll receive £299 during spring 2024.

### Pensioner Cost of Living Payment

If you have reached State Pension age, you will get a payment of up to £300. You have to claim Winter Fuel Payment to get this extra payment (see **page 13**). It will be paid as a top-up to your Winter Fuel Payment in November or December 2023.

The amount you get depends on when you were born and your circumstances during the qualifying dates. You can get a Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2023 to 2024 if you were born before 25 September 1957.

## Good to know

If you've been claiming a disability benefit such as Attendance Allowance since before 1 April 2023, you should have received a one-off Disability Cost of Living Payment of £150 in June or July 2023. You can report any missing payments at **secure.dwp.gov.uk/report-a-missing-cost-of-living-payment/welcome**.

For more information about Cost of Living Payments, visit **gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment**.

## To do

See our benefits calculator to find out what benefits you can claim (**independentage.org/get-advice/money/benefits/benefits-calculator**).

### If you owe money to your energy supplier

If you're finding it difficult to pay your energy bill, or are in debt, reach out to a debt service as soon as you can – see **page 23** for more help with debt.

You then might want to contact your energy supplier. Energy companies have to support you to find a way to pay them. They must also give extra support if you get the State Pension or have a disability or a long-term illness.

You can ask your energy supplier for:

- a review of your payments and debt repayments, especially if you pay by direct debit at a set rate
- breaks in paying, or reductions
- more time to pay
- access to hardship funds (see **page 22**)
- advice about energy efficiency.

> “I've never claimed any benefits – we were always stable, but with my husband passing away recently and the cost of living, I'm struggling with bills.

In England and Wales, you can also apply for the UK Government's Breathing Space scheme (in Scotland, there is a similar scheme called a Statutory Moratorium). This is a free service that could give you up to 60 days of legal protection from your creditors. It also freezes interest and penalty charges. You have to apply for this through a debt adviser.

If you're living with a terminal illness – or caring for someone who is – and you're worried about energy bills, Marie Curie's Support Line can help. They can give you expert information on things like supplier-specific support, grants and energy efficiency updates (**0800 090 2309, mariecurie.org.uk/energy**).

> I am so grateful for all the help and advice. I was able to obtain benefits I didn't even know I was entitled to and I feel like a heavy weight has been lifted from my shoulders.

## Good to know

If you can't agree with your energy supplier, contact Citizens Advice if you live in England or Wales (**0808 223 1133, citizensadvice.org.uk)** or Advice Direct Scotland if you live in Scotland (**0808 196 8660, energyadvice.scot**).

National Debtline has information about your rights when repaying energy arrears (**0808 808 4000**, **nationaldebtline.org**).

## Important

Your supplier isn't allowed to disconnect you between 1 October and 31 March if:

- you are State Pension age, and
- you live alone, or you only live with other people who have reached State Pension age.

### Grants and trusts

If you're struggling to pay your energy bills, your energy supplier may have a pot of money set aside to help you pay. Get in touch with them and ask if they have a grant or trust.

If your supplier doesn't have one, you can apply for a grant from the British Gas Energy Trust (**0121 348 7797, britishgasenergytrust.org.uk**). You don't have to be a British Gas customer to get this grant. You do need proof that you've been given debt advice in the past three months. This might be a letter confirming the advice given, a standard financial statement or a Personal Action Plan. You can find a list of advice services at **moneyhelper.org.uk/en/money-troubles/dealing-with-debt/debt-advice-locator.**

You can apply for grants through Charis (**01733 421075, charisgrants.com**).

> "I'm struggling with the cost of living. I had no clue how to see what I'm entitled to, until I received your help. I am very grateful.

## If you’re in debt

Problems with debt can happen suddenly and unexpectedly, especially with mortgage and rent rates rising, and bills becoming more expensive over winter. They can sometimes build up over long periods of time – for example, not paying all your water bill each month might mean you have an annual water bill debt to pay. It can be worrying, especially if you are in debt for the first time, but don’t panic – it’s never too early or too late to get help.

Debt advice services (see **page 24**) offer practical, confidential support. They can help you:

- work out a budget
- negotiate with the people you owe money to – your creditors
- advise you on your rights
- work out your priority debts – the ones you need to pay first
- learn more about other options available to you – for example, getting a loan from a credit union.

### Where to get help with debt

You can get free, specialist advice from:

- National Debtline (**0808 808 4000, nationaldebtline.org**)
- Stepchange (**0800 138 1111, stepchange.org**)
- Debt Advice Foundation (**0800 043 4050, debtadvicefoundation.org**)
- Money and Pensions Service (**01159 659570, moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk/our-debt-work**).

As well as phone helplines, many of these services also have webchat options – it can be difficult to speak about debt, so think about what you would prefer.

If you need support, always seek specialist advice first. It can be tempting to go to loan sharks for help with debt, but this can be dangerous and make your problem worse.

For more information about debt advice, see our webpage **independentage.org/get-advice/money/debt**.

# 2. Staying safe

Cold weather brings different challenges. Here are some ways to keep safe over the winter months.

### Good to know

Our **Home safety** guide has lots of information about looking after yourself around your home. Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to order a free copy.

## Fire safety

To stay safe from fire this winter, follow this home fire safety advice.

- Fit at least one working smoke alarm on every floor of your home and a heat alarm in your kitchen. Test them regularly by pressing the test button until they beep.
- Be careful if you're using open fires to keep warm. Make sure you always use a fire guard to protect against flying sparks from embers.
- Always use a candle holder and never leave candles unattended.
- If you smoke, try to smoke outdoors. Never smoke in bed, and make sure you extinguish smoking materials properly.

- Keep portable heaters away from curtains and furniture, and never use them for drying clothes. Always unplug electric heaters when you go out or go to bed.
- Never use hot water bottles in the same bed as an electric blanket.
- Make an escape plan in case of fire. Know your escape route and keep it clear.
- If you would be unable to escape without help in the event of a fire, talk to your care provider or the fire service about this.

Your local fire service may be able to check that your home is fire safe. Contact them directly and ask if you qualify for a home fire safety visit. You can find your local fire service at **nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Fire-and-Rescue-Services** or by calling the National Fire Chiefs Council on **0121 380 7311.**

If there is a fire in your home, get out, stay out and call **999** for the fire service.

## Important

If you suspect you've got a gas leak in your home, call the National Gas Emergency number on **0800 111 999.**

## Carbon monoxide

Free-standing gas heaters, gas cookers, gas fires, boilers and water heaters can all leak carbon monoxide.

First, get a carbon monoxide alarm. They are available from most DIY shops and supermarkets. Check the batteries in it regularly.

Look out for the signs of a gas leak:

- the gas flame on an appliance appearing 'floppy' and burning yellow instead of blue
- your pilot light appearing 'floppy' or blowing out frequently
- soot or yellow-brown stains appearing around an appliance
- smelling or seeing smoke
- a lot of condensation in the same room as a gas appliance.

You may have carbon monoxide poisoning if you feel flu-like symptoms inside your home, but they go away when you're outside. You should call a doctor as soon as you can if you experience headache, nausea, breathlessness or dizziness, or have fainted or been unconscious.

The best ways to protect yourself are to know the signs, have your gas appliances serviced every year and fit a carbon monoxide alarm.

## Slips and falls

### In your home

It's important to make sure your home is safe, especially if you are doing more exercise and activities in it during winter, so:

- use a non-slip bathmat
- mop up spills immediately
- have a night-light in the bedroom, or bedside light or torch by your bed in case you need to get up in the night
- keep your floors clear of trailing leads
- keep stairs clear from clutter and well lit
- do not overload electrical sockets
- carry a mobile phone with you so you can call for help if you need to.

### Being careful outside

If you must 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. Check if your council can give it to you for free, or you can buy it from a DIY store. Some councils provide it for free in on-street grit boxes.

If you live in England or Wales, you can find out which streets your council will grit at **gov.uk/roads-council-will-grit**. If you live in Scotland, Traffic Scotland has an online map of which roads they will grit (**traffic.gov.scot/traffic-information/winter-salt-treatment**).

It's a good idea to carry a mobile phone with you if you can. Make sure it's fully charged before you go outside.

> "In winter we need to be more careful of falling and it is helpful to learn and practise getting up off the floor.

## If you have a fall

If you do have a fall, lie still for a minute.
Try to stay calm and check yourself for injuries.

If you can't get up, or feel pain in your hip or back, try to call for help by using your phone or pendant, or by banging on radiators or walls. Try to keep warm by covering yourself with whatever is close by, and try to keep moving your arms and legs and roll from side to side if you are able to.

If you can get up:

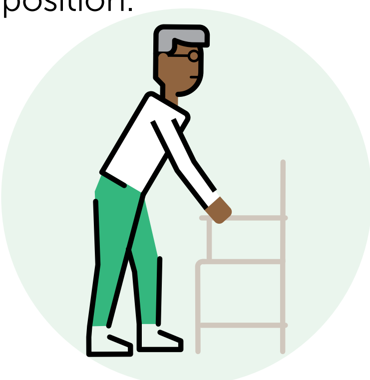
**1.**
Roll on to your side, and then push up on to your elbows.

**2.**
Use your arms to push yourself upwards, on to your hands and knees.

3.
Crawl towards a very stable piece of furniture (a sturdy chair or bed) and hold on to it for support.

4.
Move your foot on your stronger leg forwards, so your foot is flat on the floor.

5.
Lean forwards and push up on the furniture, using your arms and front leg. Slowly rise to a standing position.



6.
Turn around and sit down. Sit for a minute or two and catch your breath.

## Scams

Scams are crimes. Criminals trick people into giving away money and personal information. These tricks can be complex and take a long time, or can be as instant as a text message or phone call. Scammers take advantage of times of uncertainty.

Be aware of where any benefits or financial help are coming from. From **page 11,** this guide outlines what is available and where you will get it. A local authority would never contact you to get your bank details.

Be wary of all cold-callers and 'too good to be true' deals. If you're unsure about whether something is a scam, call the organisation directly. Make sure you find their number yourself – for example, by looking at a bank statement or in the phone book.

Remember, any legitimate organisation reaching out to you won't put time pressures on you.

Scammers exploit uncertainty, such as the cost of living crisis, and will try to pressure you into making snap decisions. Always take time to think about any financial decision you're making. You should seek independent financial advice if it is a big decision.

### If someone has scammed you

Scams are becoming more and more complicated, and many people fall victim to them. You have nothing to be ashamed of – you have been the victim of a crime.

If you think you have been scammed, contact your bank immediately. Then, make sure you report it. If you live in England or Wales, report scams to Action Fraud (**0300 123 2040, actionfraud.police.uk**).
If you live in Scotland, report any scams to Police Scotland (**101**).

Order a free copy of our **Scamwise** guide by calling our Helpline on **0800 319 6789.**

> “It's more relevant than ever that we remain alert. These criminals are professional and good at what they do – be aware and don't engage with them.

## Health emergencies

We all know that NHS resources become stretched over winter. But this shouldn't stop you getting emergency help when you need it. The information here applies for both mental health and physical health emergencies. If you would like more tips on managing mental health, see **page 39.**

### If the emergency is life-threatening

Call **999** if you or someone else is seriously ill or injured, and there is a risk to life. If you are deaf, hearing impaired or have a speech impediment, you can register for the emergencySMS scheme (**emergencysms.net**). This service means you can contact emergency services via SMS text message.

Once you are in touch with the emergency services, try to stay calm. Try your best to answer all the questions they ask. Stay on the line until the person handling your call has told you that they have all the information they need.

### If you need urgent medical help, but aren't sure what to do

Contact the NHS 111 service, either by calling **111** or going online at **111.nhs.uk**. You can ask for a translator if you need one. The person you speak to will be able to advise what is best to do to get you help.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call **999.** You should go to your local NHS Accident & Emergency if you need an urgent mental health assessment.

You can call the Samaritans free on **116 123** if you need to talk to someone urgently about how you are feeling.

## Good to know

In Scotland, if your health issue isn't urgent, you might be able to use the NHS Minor Ailment Scheme. Under this scheme, if you don't usually pay for prescriptions, you can get advice from a pharmacist, and you may also be able to get medicines for minor illnesses without needing to see your GP. Ask your pharmacy if they are a part of it.


# 3. Staying well

Keeping yourself as well as possible is vital in winter. The cold weather and short days can make it more challenging to look after ourselves, so here are some tips and advice.

## Mental health and wellbeing

We know things may be difficult at the moment. If you find yourself feeling anxious, stressed or overwhelmed, there's support out there for you. Reach out to your GP, or an organisation like The Silver Line (**0800 470 8090**, **thesilverline.org.uk**) or Samaritans (**116 123, samaritans.org**) for help.

As well as exercising and eating well, staying connected with others can help to improve your mental health.

Stay in touch with friends, family, neighbours, clubs and your community by phone or meeting up. It can be useful to keep a list of these phone numbers to remind you to call, or use a calendar to remind you of important events and reasons to reach out. If you're able to volunteer, giving back to our communities is a great way to feel connected.

Read our guide **If you're feeling lonely** for tips on things you could try.

If you feel yourself being anxious or worrying a lot, try to focus on things in your control. Limit how much news you watch or listen to. Take time to chat about how you're feeling with people you trust. If you feel like you're panicking, try to take deep breaths.

It's always a good idea to keep to your routine, as much as you can. Some people find daily to-do lists helpful. Take time to notice the little things that make you smile, and schedule in activities that you enjoy. Continue accessing treatment and support for physical and mental health conditions from your GP.

If you struggle with low mood and tiredness during the winter, you may be experiencing seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Visit **nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad/overview** for more information, or speak to your GP.

> "Your local library is a warm place not just for reading but for using computers and finding out what's going on. There are often reading groups, talks and classes. It's a great place to go.

## Good to know

If you are struggling with a particular mental health concern we have free guides focusing on:

- **Understanding alcohol and drug misuse**
- **Managing anxiety**
- **Dealing with depression**
- **Hoarding**.

You can order free copies by calling our Helpline on **0800 319 6789.**

## Eating well

You might be worried about having to cook food this winter, but it's important that you eat at least one hot meal a day to help keep you warm and healthy. See **page 6** for information about which appliances use less energy to cook.

It's also a good idea to have plenty of variety in your diet. This helps you get all the nutrients you need and maintain a healthy weight.

Stay hydrated – we need about 6–8 drinks a day to stay well hydrated. This reduces infections and improves concentration, energy and mood. If you drink alcohol, it is recommended to not have more than 14 units (one unit is a half pint or a small glass of wine) a week. Try to spread this out and have alcohol-free days. Alcohol does dehydrate you so, if you can, have water, juice or a soft drink too.

> "Make yourself get out of bed in the morning and have a warm drink and something to eat – get your body going!

If you have a poor appetite:

- eat little and often
- use full-fat food and drinks – for example, full-fat milk, yoghurts and cheese
- eat more protein, such as meat, fish, eggs, pulses or nuts. It may help to speak to your GP if you're worried about what you're eating
- make meal preparation easy, for when you need something quick and simple. For example, stock up on healthy ready meals, snacks and finger food, and use meal-delivery services if you can.

If you're struggling to get out, some charities offer help if you have difficulty with food shopping.

- Age UK England offers home delivery services for a small fee (**0800 678 1602**, **ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/shopping**).
- Age UK Cymru also has a supported shopping service (**01286 685911**, **ageuk.org.uk/cymru/gwyneddamon/our-services/supported-shopping-scheme**).
- In Scotland, Food Train make food deliveries, and can also help with household jobs and provide books through a library service (visit **thefoodtrain.co.uk** to find your local branch).

Your council also might be able to provide food deliveries, or Meals on Wheels. You can check at **gov.uk/meals-home**, or call the council.

If you're struggling to buy or prepare food yourself, you should contact your local council for a care needs assessment **gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services**.

Contact our Helpline for advice or to order a copy of our guide **Getting help at home** (**0800 319 6789, helpline@independentage.org**).

## Food banks

If you're having trouble affording food, you could contact your local food bank. It can supply emergency food and support. The Trussell Trust has more information on where you can find a food bank (**01722 580 178**, **trusselltrust.org**). You can also find your nearest food bank using the Independent Food Aid Network's online map (**foodaidnetwork.org.uk/our-members**).

If you can't get online, you can call your local council, or our free Helpline on **0800 319 6789**.

## Keeping active

Any movement is good for us, particularly as we go out less in winter. It can make us feel warmer, and can improve our sleep, appetite and mood. Later Life Training has a list of strength and balance exercise resources you can use at home. You can access these online at **laterlifetraining.co.uk/supporting-people-to-be-active-at-home**.

Here are some seated and standing exercises you could try at home. Before you start, get your space ready for you to move around it. Clear away any clutter or trip hazards, but keep something sturdy nearby that you can use for support. Keep a phone nearby in case you need it, and a glass of water ready to sip as you exercise.

As you start, make sure you take it at your own pace. You can gradually build up the intensity if you feel like it. You might feel stiff or ache as you move your body, but if you start feeling any pain or dizziness, stop and rest. If this continues, contact your GP for advice. Make sure to keep breathing as you move.

Remember to do the warm-up first, and the cool down afterwards.

## Warm up

### Seated march

Warms muscles and prepares for movement.

**What to do**

- Sit at the front of the chair.
- Hold the sides of the chair.
- March with control.
- Build to a rhythm that feels comfortable.
- Continue for 1–2 minutes.

## Seated exercises

Make sure that the chair you use is sturdy and stable, so it doesn't move around when you're getting in and out of it. Wear comfortable clothes and supportive footwear.

## Wrist strengthener

Improves grip strength and helps opening jars.

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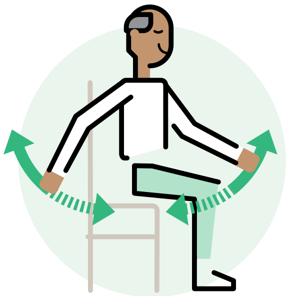
|---|---|
| **What to do** | • Fold or roll a hand towel or tea towel into a tube shape.<br>• Sit tall then squeeze the towel tightly with both hands, hold for a slow count of five then release.<br>• Repeat this exercise 6-8 times. |
| **More challenging option** | • Squeeze then twist your towel before holding for 10 seconds. |



## Arm swings

Helps with stamina and endurance.

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| **What to do** | • Sit tall away from the chair back.<br>• Place both feet flat on the floor directly under knees.<br>• Bend elbows and swing arms from the shoulder.<br>• Build to a rhythm that is comfortable.<br>• Continue for 30 seconds. |
| **More challenging option** | • Increase pace and time to 1–2 minutes. |

## Pelvic floor strengthener

Helps reduce ‘leaking’ when coughing and laughing.

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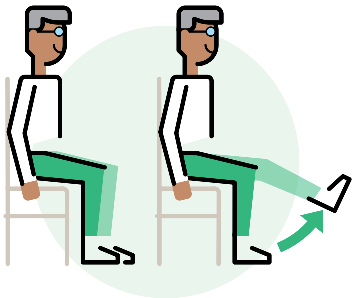
| **What to do** | • Tighten the muscles as if you were trying to stop passing urine and wind at the same time and hold.<br>• Try to hold together for 10 seconds.<br>• Rest for four seconds, then repeat.<br>• Perform this 10 times. |
| **Avoid** | • Squeezing legs together.<br>• Tightening buttocks.<br>• Holding breath. |
| **More challenging option** | • Try 10 quick contractions by drawing up the pelvic floor. |



## Front knee strengthener

Strengthens the knee for walking and bending.

**What to do**

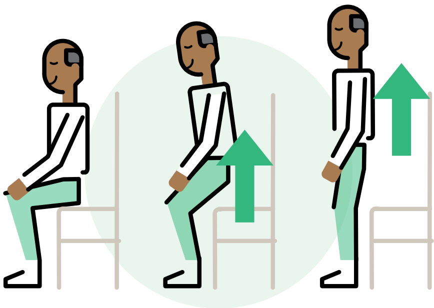
- Sit back in the chair, back supported and feet under knees.
- Brush one foot across the floor then lift the ankle slowly and straighten (do not lock) the knee.
- Lower the foot with control.
- Aim to lift for a slow count of three and lower for a slow count of five each time.
- Repeat 10 times on one leg then swap legs.

**More challenging option**

- Sit away from the back of the chair so more of your leg is off the chair when you lift. Keep the back strong while you lift the leg.

## Some standing exercises

Make sure that you are near a sturdy and stable worktop, and that any chairs used will not move during the exercise. Wear comfortable clothes and supportive footwear.



## Sit to stand

Improves lower limb strength and stability, if repeated regularly and slowly.

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|---|---|
| **What to do** | • Sit tall near the front of the chair.<br>• Place feet slightly behind knees.<br>• Lean slightly forwards.<br>• Stand up (using hands on the chair for support if needed – progress to no hands over time).<br>• Step back until legs touch the chair, then stand tall, bend knees and slowly lower bottom back into the chair.<br>• Repeat 10 times. |
| **More challenging option** | • Try doing the exercise extra slowly and hover for a few seconds just before finally sitting. |

## Heel raises

Helps strengthen muscles at the front of the foot and improves balance.

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| **What to do** | • Stand tall holding a sturdy table, chair or even the sink.<br>• Raise heels taking your weight over the big toe and second toe, hold for a second.<br>• Lower heels to the floor with control.<br>• Repeat 10 times. |
| **More challenging option** | • Repeat the exercise, doing it slowly, and hold for a second or so just before putting the heel down again. |

## One-leg stands

Helps improve walking stability.

| | |
|---|---|
| **What to do** | • Stand close to a support surface and hold on.<br>• Balance on one leg, keeping the supporting leg straight but knee soft.<br>• Stand tall and look ahead.<br>• Hold for 10 seconds.<br>• Repeat on the other leg. |
| **More challenging option** | • Try to use the support surface less and hold the position for longer, up to 30 seconds. |

## Cool down

Finish by marching at a relaxed pace for 1–2 minutes or try this stretch.

### Back-of-thigh stretch

Helps with putting on shoes and socks and lengthens stride when walking.

**What to do**

- Sit at the very front of the chair.
- Straighten one leg, placing the heel on the floor.
- Place both hands on the other leg, then sit really tall.
- Lean forwards with a straight back and feel the stretch in the back of the thigh.
- Hold for 10–20 seconds.
- Relax and repeat on the other leg.

Any activity that warms you up and increases your heart rate can also be beneficial. You could try dancing or going up and down stairs. You could also do everyday things like cleaning, gardening or standing and stretching regularly.

Don't forget to ask your GP, library, leisure centre or your family and friends for information about any walking, strength and balance or other physical activity groups that you can join.

### Good to know

The NHS has lots of online resources about exercise at **nhs.uk/live-well/exercise**. We Are Undefeatable (**weareundefeatable.co.uk**) also has information about managing exercise with a long-term health condition.

> Drink plenty of hot drinks. Don't skimp on eating nourishing food. Move around inside and outside. Don't be afraid to seek advice.

# Getting your jabs

## 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
- you're in a long-stay care home
- you're a carer of an older person
- you have certain health conditions, such as diabetes or asthma.

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.

> "Get your flu jab and any other jab that you may be able to have, like shingles.

## Check you've had a pneumo jab

The pneumonia vaccine (also called a pneumococcal or pneumo jab) is a one-off jab. It helps protect against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia. You can get a free jab if you're 65 or over.

Contact your GP to get the jab or to check if you've already had it.

## COVID-19 in winter

In autumn 2023 a COVID-19 booster jab will be offered for free to anyone:

- aged 65 years or over, or
- living in a care home, or
- living with a medical condition that makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19.

Staying on top of your booster jabs can keep you safer from COVID-19. If you can get the booster, you will be told by your GP when you can book an appointment. You can then book directly with them, or book online at **nhs.uk/nhs-services/covid-19-services/covid-19-vaccination-services/book-covid-19-vaccination**.

## Get your shingles vaccination

From 1 September 2023 you're eligible for a free shingles jab when you turn 65. If you turned 65 before 1 September 2023, you'll qualify for the shingles jab when you turn 70. Either way, you'll remain eligible until your 80th birthday.

You will also qualify for the shingles vaccine if you're aged 50 or over and have a severely weakened immune system – for example, due to blood cancer. If you're unsure if you qualify, ask your GP.

Your GP should contact you to make an appointment to have your shingles vaccine. Contact your GP surgery if you think you qualify for the shingles vaccine and you've not been contacted about it.

> "Keep active and stimulate the brain. Get out and about when you can. Isolation and loneliness can be devastating. Live well this winter.

## Rhona's story

The cost of everything is going up. I have to have the heating on because of my health. The winter is the most worrying time, so I keep warm in my bed. For anyone with arthritis, they'll know what I'm talking about.

I don’t have to pay for my television licence because I get Pension Credit. I couldn’t do without watching the television: that’s my lifeline. When my body’s hurting, I get into my bed and watch something.

I don’t think a lot of people know about benefits. Some people don’t know what they’re entitled to. I would tell someone to go and talk to Citizens Advice or Independent Age.

We older people try to do things for ourselves. We don’t like to think we’re getting old. But some people can’t do it themselves, and we do need help.

> “I don’t think a lot of people know about benefits. Some people don’t know what they’re entitled to. I would tell someone to go and talk to Citizens Advice or Independent Age.

## About Independent Age

No one should face financial hardship in later life.

Independent Age is a national charity providing support for older people facing financial hardship. We offer free impartial advice and information on what matters most: money, housing and care.

We financially support local community organisations across the UK through our grants programme. We campaign for change for older people struggling with their finances.

You can call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm) or email **helpline@independentage.org** to arrange to speak to one of our advisers.

To donate or help support our work, please visit **independentage.org/support-us**.

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