

# The effects of poor housing on health

A summary of the main health impacts of common housing faults, how to make improvements and who can help.

Produced by



## DAMP, CONDENSATION AND MOULD GROWTH

### Health Impact:

- *Asthma*
- *Bronchitis*
- *Range of other respiratory problems*
- *Arthritis and Rheumatism*
- *Mental health e.g. depression*

## Main causes of damp

### ● Rising Damp

This results from a lack of an effective barrier (a 'damp proof course') between the water in the ground and the walls of the home. Water soaks upwards from the ground leaving a "tide mark" (not usually more than one metre high).

#### Action:

*improve/repair damp proof course.*

### ● Penetrating Damp

Rain water is getting into the fabric of the home through walls, render, unsealed joints, roof leaks, chimney stacks, flashings.

One common cause is blockage of gutters or down-pipes which results in rainwater running down the walls. If left untreated major damage can be caused to the building.

#### Action:

*Repair cause of water penetration. May also have to remove and replace damaged internal plaster work and affected timbers.*

### ● Plumbing Defects

Even a very minor leak in pipe-work can cause a significant damp patch.

#### Action:

*Locate defect and repair as soon as possible.*



## Main causes of condensation

Condensation occurs when warm, moist air meets a cold surface. This may result in patches of black or green mould growth. Causes include:

- **An excess of water vapour in the air**
- **Cold surfaces eg. poorly insulated walls/metal window frames**
- **Inadequate heating resulting in the fabric of the building being cold**

### Action:

- *Reduce level of moisture in home. Possible steps:*
  - *improve ventilation, especially in kitchen and bathroom*
  - *cover pans when cooking*
  - *reduce amount of wet washing drying in home*
  - *avoid use of calor gas or paraffin (both produce large amounts of water vapour)*
- *Improve insulation, particularly lofts & walls where cold spots cause problems*
- *Increase use of heating*
- *Install central heating which maintains a higher background temperature and avoids cooling down of the main fabric of the home*

## Possible Financial Help

Warm Front grants. Loans or grants via some local authorities. Emergency help linked to welfare benefits or from charities. Check welfare benefits to increase income and/or claim lump sum heating allowance. Information from local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or Age Concern.*

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## COLD HOMES

### Health Impact:

- *Respiratory illness*
- *Cardiovascular conditions*
- *Hypothermia*
- *Increased risk of accidents and falls*
- *Impaired mental function*
- *Mental health (depression/isolation)*
- *Rheumatism and arthritis*



## Causes of cold homes

- **Inadequate or inefficient heating systems**
- **Poor insulation**
- **Under-use of available heating due to worry about cost.**

### Action:

- *Improve or replace heating system*
- *Improve insulation*
- *Provide people with information and advice about their energy use: The most inefficient and expensive heating (calor gas and electricity) is more likely to be used by low income households. With better information and advice, people may be able to keep warmer without spending more money – and through welfare benefits advice people may find that they are able to claim help with fuel bills.*

## Possible Financial Help

Warm Front grants for central heating and insulation. Loans or grants via some local authorities. Emergency help linked to welfare benefits or from charities. Check welfare benefits to increase income and/or claim lump sum heating allowance. Information from local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or Age Concern*.

### **Did you know...**

*For every degree that the temperature falls below the winter average there are approx. 8,000 extra deaths*

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## DEFECTIVE AND INADEQUATE ELECTRICAL WIRING

### Health Impact:

- Risk of injury caused by electric shocks or house fires
- Risk of accident or injury if circuits fuse/trip frequently and if sockets and switches are inadequate or poorly located
- Trip hazard caused by trailing wires and extension cables
- Mental health – worry about fire risk

## Indicators of problems with electrical wiring

- Frequent fusing or tripping of circuits
- Extensive use of multiple adaptors/trailing cables may indicate lack of sockets and subsequent overloading
- Old switches and sockets may indicate that wiring is out of date

### Action:

- Install a smoke alarm
- Instigate electricity company safety check, (but consider what action can be taken if system is condemned as unsafe eg. temporary emergency heating)
- Often a full rewire will be needed. This should include improved location of sockets and switches to remove risks from bending and stretching. Also consider location of light fittings/two-way switching in halls and landings to reduce risk arising from walking around in the dark to find switches. Use only electricians registered with approved schemes eg. NICEIC

## Possible Financial Help

Local authority loans or grants in some areas – contact local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or Age Concern* for information.

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## DEFECTIVE GAS APPLIANCES OR COAL FIRE

### Health Impact:

- *Carbon monoxide poisoning*
- *Risk of explosion in case of gas*
- *Fire hazard from blocked chimneys or flues*

### Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning

- *May be similar to viral infections, including*
  - *Drowsiness*
  - *Headaches*
  - *Nausea*
  - *Chest pains*

*Exposure to relatively low levels can cause brain damage or death*

### Indicators of faulty appliances creating carbon monoxide build up

- *Soot or stain marks on appliance*
- *Yellow or orange 'lazy' flame - should be crisp and blue*
- *Condensation*

### Action:

- *Install a carbon monoxide detector as well as a smoke alarm*
- *Ensure that boilers, fires and flues are checked, (consider what action can be taken if a heating system is condemned as unsafe and switched off) Checks and remedial action must be carried out by CORGI registered contractors*

### Possible Financial Help

Local home safety initiatives. Local authority loans or grants in some areas – contact local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or Age Concern* for information.

#### **Did you know...**

*More people die from CO poisoning from coal fires than from gas appliances?*

*Regular chimney sweeping can prevent CO poisoning and reduce the dangers of inhaling coal tar fumes.*

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## A-Z OF NATIONAL INFORMATION

### Age Concern England Information Line

This is a Freephone service offering information and fact sheets on issues affecting older people, including housing and finance. They can also refer you to local services. Tel: 0800 009966 Information and fact sheets are also available on their website: [www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk)

### Care & Repair England

Produce In Good Repair, a free self help guide to home repairs and adaptations aimed at older and disabled people. Produce information about developing services and policies related to housing and older people. Tel: 0115 950 6500 [www.careandrepair-england.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk)

### Citizens Advice Bureaux

Local offices provide information and advice on all topics, including benefits and housing. Some can give specialist legal help through local solicitors. The national office can give details of local services. Tel: 020 7833 2181. [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

### Disablement Information and Advice Lines and DIAL UK

Local DIALs are independent disability advice centres providing information and advice to disabled people and their advisers. Local DIALs offer information but vary in the level of support services they can offer. DIAL UK (01302 310123) can give details of local services. [www.dialuk.org.uk](http://www.dialuk.org.uk)

### Disabled Living Centres

At some Disabled Living Centres you can see and try out equipment that helps people to live independently and expert staff can give free information and advice. Info re; nearest centre from the Disabled Living Centres Council. Tel: 0161 834 1044 Text: 0161 839 0885 [www.dlcc.org.uk](http://www.dlcc.org.uk)

### Disability Law Service

This is a free service for people with mental, physical or sensory disabilities, their families, carers or friends. It helps people to understand their legal rights, suggests what they might do to improve their situation and where appropriate may represent them. Tel: 020 7791 9800.18

### Elderly Accommodation Counsel

Provide information and advice by phone, post and email about housing options, including details about local care homes, other accommodation and care and support services. Tel: 020 7820 1343 email: [enquiries@e-a-c.demon.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@e-a-c.demon.co.uk) Comprehensive website [www.housingcare.org.uk](http://www.housingcare.org.uk)

### Help the Aged Seniorline

This is a free telephone advice service offering advice or information on a wide range of issues including benefits and housing, but not on legal matters. They can also refer you to local services. Information available from their website. Tel: 0808 800 6565 [www.seniorline@helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.seniorline@helptheaged.org.uk)

## Home Improvement Agencies

These local services help older and disabled people to carry out repairs and adaptations to their homes. To find out where your nearest agency is contact Foundations, the national co-ordinating body for HIAs.

Tel: 0808 800 5656 [www-foundations.uk.com](http://www-foundations.uk.com)

## Ricability

Ricability is an independent research charity that publishes impartial guides to a wide range of equipment and services which are of use to older and disabled people.

Tel: 020 7427 2460 Textphone: 020 7427 2469 [www.ricability.org.uk](http://www.ricability.org.uk)

## Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

Provide information and advice for people with visual impairment.

Tel: 0845 766 9999 [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

Provide information and advice for people with hearing impairment.

Freephone: 0808 808 0123 [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

## Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Provide information and advice about all aspects of safety, including in the home.  
[www.rospace.co.uk](http://www.rospace.co.uk)

## Trading Standards Departments and Consumer Advice Centres

If building work goes wrong they may provide advice and information about possible legal action and using the small claims court. Contact via local authority.

## Energy Advice

**Energy Efficiency Advice Line:** Free, independent information and advice on all aspects of energy in the home and about insulation grants. Tel: 0800 512 012

**Energy Saving Trust:** To find grants and other information. [www.saveenergy.co.uk](http://www.saveenergy.co.uk)

**Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem):** Advice on switching fuel suppliers and finding the best deal Tel: 020 7901 7000 [www.ofgem.gov.uk](http://www.ofgem.gov.uk)

**Warm Front:** Government funded grant scheme  
Advice, surveys and installation Tel: 0800 072 0150  
Tel: 0800 316 6011

**Carbon Monoxide – Gas Safety:** Emergency Hotline: 0800 111 999  
Gas Safety Advice Line: 0800 300 363

Information produced by Care & Repair England as part of its 'Healthy Homes, Healthier Lives' project which is supported by the Department of Health and the Rayne Foundation

Care & Repair England is a national charity established in 1986 to improve the housing and living conditions of older and disabled people. Its aim is to innovate, develop, promote and support housing policies and initiatives which enable older and disabled people to live independently in their homes for as long as they wish. Tel: 0115 950 6500 [www.careandrepair-england.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk)

*Care & Repair England is an Industrial and Provident Society with Charitable Status Reg. No. 25121*