

# Living Safely & Well at Home



A practical guide to improving your home to make it safer and healthier

## The effects of housing on health

As we get older the condition of our home becomes increasingly important to our health.

Many common health problems, such as heart disease, respiratory infections, stroke and arthritis, may be caused or made worse by the condition of our homes, and the risk of falls increases with age.

Repairs and adaptations can make your home a safer & healthier place to live.



### This brochure explains

- *how common housing faults may affect your health*
- *how to make improvements*
- *who may offer information and practical help*

**did you know**

More than half a million people aged 65 and over were admitted as an emergency to hospital with potentially avoidable conditions (eg fractures, respiratory infections & dehydration) in 2012-13. Many of these could be avoided through housing related improvements & better care at home.

Produced by



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Contact EAC FirstStop about all aspects of housing & care  
[www.firststopadvice.org](http://www.firststopadvice.org)  
Advice Line: 0800 377 70 70

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# Stairs, steps and poor lighting

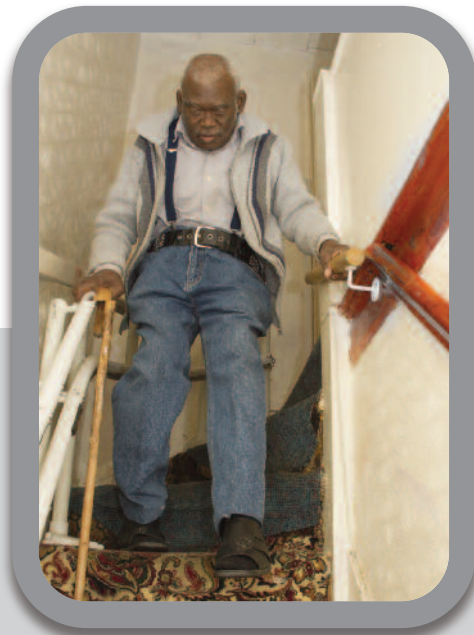
## These increase the risk of:

- Falls - around half of all falls happen at home
- Hip & other fractures

## Action:

### To make your home safer:

- Install a second handrail on staircases
- Put in brighter lighting, especially on stairs & by steps
- Have grab rails put in next to steps, toilet, bath and/or shower
- Repair loose or uneven stairs, secure carpets, remove loose rugs
- Remove things you can trip over eg trailing electrical cables
- Have a touch-sensitive lamp by the bed to avoid reaching for switches in the dark.
- Keep warm & active - being cold increases risk of falls



## did you know

One in three people over the age of 65, and one in two over 80's, fall each year.

One in five people die within three months of a hip fracture.

## top tip

As well as making the home safer, the risk of falling is reduced if you:

- 1 Exercise to maintain muscle tone
- 2 Have regular medication reviews
- 3 Get your vision checked

## Who can help?

### Contact EAC FirstStop

0800 377 70 70 to find local providers of home safety & falls checks, alarm systems & adaptations.

### Disabled Living Foundation

provides advice about equipment, adaptations & services to make living independently at home safer  
[www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk) 0300 999 0004

**Rica** [www.rica.org.uk](http://www.rica.org.uk) publish practical consumer reports about equipment & services that enable independence.

**Foundations** [www.foundations.uk.com](http://www.foundations.uk.com) can put you in touch with a home improvement agency (see P8).

# Cold homes

## May cause or make these conditions worse:

- Respiratory (COPD, asthma etc)
- Cardiovascular disease (eg heart problems, stroke)
- Arthritis & rheumatism
- Mental health problems
- Hypothermia

## Causes of cold homes

- Poorly insulated building - wasting expensive heat
- Inadequate or inefficient heating system
- Not turning on heating due to worry about cost



## Action:

- Improve home insulation
- Improve or replace inefficient heating system
- Claim benefits to help to meet the cost of heating

## did you know

According to the NHS between 18°C and 21°C is a healthy room temperature. Below 9°C poses the risk of hypothermia and death.

Blood pressure increases when temperatures fall below 12°C. The risk of heart attack or stroke increases as blood pressure rises.

## top tip

Make sure that you are getting the most heat for your money.

- Are you on the best possible tariff?
- Using the most efficient fuel?

See [MoneySavingExpert.com](http://MoneySavingExpert.com) or [which.co.uk/switch/energy-advice](http://which.co.uk/switch/energy-advice) or [energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://energysavingtrust.org.uk)

## Who can help?

### Contact EAC FirstStop

0800 377 70 70 for information about current schemes & see **Energy Advice** on p8.

**Foundations** can put you in touch with a home improvement agency and the local **Age UK** may offer cold weather help (see P8).

*Homes which are too warm also cause health problems. Many of the remedies are the same - improve insulation and ventilation. The NHS website [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) includes Heatwave information.*

# Damp, condensation and mould growth

## Can make these health conditions worse:

- Respiratory eg asthma, bronchitis etc
- Arthritis and rheumatism
- Mental health eg depression, anxiety etc

## Main causes of damp

### Penetrating damp

You may see isolated damp patches on walls & ceilings, sometimes with mould growth. Rainwater is getting into the fabric of the home through defects in the walls, render, joints, roof, chimney stacks, flashings etc. One common cause is blockage of gutters or down-pipes which results in rainwater running down the outside walls. If left untreated major damage can be caused eg rotting structural timbers.

#### Action:

- Repair the cause of water penetration as soon as possible. You may have to remove and replace internal plaster work and affected timber.

### Rising damp

This is usually caused by lack of an effective barrier ('a damp proof course' or DPC) between the water in the ground and the walls of the home. Water soaks up the wall leaving a 'tide mark' on the inside wall (not usually more than 1 metre high).

#### Action:

- Keep the base of outside walls clear of debris
- Remove any soil which may be covering the damp proof course (DPC)
- Repair or improve the DPC - this is a more technical (expensive) job. See Technical Help section to make absolutely sure that the DPC is the problem.

### Plumbing defects

Even a minor leak in water or waste pipes can cause a significant damp patch.

#### Action:

- If the leak is rapid turn off the water supply at the stopcock
- Locate the defect and repair leaks straight away

**top  
tip**

**Make sure you know where the stopcock is and turn it a couple of times a year to prevent it seizing up. If it is difficult to reach consider installing a wall mounted switch - some water companies advise on this.**

## Main causes of condensation

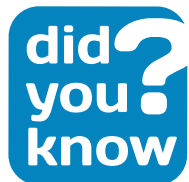
Condensation occurs when warm, moist air meets a cold surface. This may result in black or green mould growth. Causes include:

- An excess of water vapour in the air
- Cold surfaces eg. poorly insulated walls
- Inadequate home heating resulting in the fabric of the building being cold



### Action:

- Reduce the amount of water vapour in the home by:
  - as far as possible avoid drying wet washing inside the home, especially in poorly ventilated areas. If unavoidable, dry clothes in the bathroom with the door closed and window open.
  - always cover pans when cooking
  - avoid using calor gas or paraffin - both produce large amounts of water vapour
- Increase ventilation, especially in kitchen and bathrooms - open windows, turn on extractors
- Improve insulation, particularly in lofts and walls - cold spots can result in mould growth
- Maintain a slightly higher, more constant background temperature to avoid cooling down the main fabric of the building



**Mould spores can aggravate eye & skin conditions as well as causing respiratory problems. If you are removing mould growth use a protective face mask, goggles & rubber gloves**

### Technical Information

- [www.maintainyourbuilding.org.uk/pages/rising\\_damp](http://www.maintainyourbuilding.org.uk/pages/rising_damp)
- **World Health Organisation** ([www.euro.who.int/en/home](http://www.euro.who.int/en/home)) for brochure '*Damp and mould: health risks, prevention and remedial action*'
- **Building Research Establishment** sells technical guides [www.brebookshop.com](http://www.brebookshop.com)

## Who can help?

### Contact EAC FirstStop

0800 377 70 70 for help to find local services who can offer technical advice and help with finding reputable builders.

### Foundations

[www.foundations.uk.com](http://www.foundations.uk.com) / 08458645210 will put you in touch with a local home improvement agency which can help with organising building work if you own your home.

**Shelter** ([www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)) and **CAB** (see p8) can also offer specialist advice about landlords' repairing obligations.



# Defective or inadequate electrical wiring

## Increases risk of

- Falls due to trailing wires & extension cables
- Accidents if circuits fuse/trip frequently and if sockets & switches are poorly located
- Injury caused by electric shocks or house fires
- Depression and anxiety if you worry about these risks

## What to look out for

- Extensive use of multiple adaptors/trailing extensions may indicate lack of sockets and subsequent overloading
- Frequent fusing or tripping of circuits
- Old style switches, sockets & light fittings indicating that wiring is out of date
- Burning smells from or discoloration of sockets and appliances



## Action:

- As an absolute minimum install a smoke alarm as old wiring increases fire risk
- If you rely on extension leads and adaptors install additional sockets. Always use a registered electrician.
- Ask for a safety check by the electricity supplier but do consider what can be done if the system is condemned as unsafe eg temporary emergency heating
- If a full rewire is needed consider raising sockets and lowering switches to make them easier to reach and reduce falls risk.

**did you know?**

**At least one person in the UK dies each week from an electrical accident and nearly 1,000 are injured every day**

## Who can help?

**Contact EAC FirstStop** 0800 377 70 70 to find out more

**Electrical Safety First** [www.esc.org.uk](http://www.esc.org.uk) offers safety advice - leaflets, a calculator to check overloading of sockets and a free smartphone app to run a simple visual check of home electrics.

**The Fire Service's** free home fire safety checks include electrical safety [www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/hfsc](http://www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/hfsc)

A local **Home Improvement Agency** or **AgeUK** may run Traders lists or handy person services (see p8).

# Defective Gas or Solid Fuel Appliances

## Health risks include:

- Exacerbated respiratory conditions
- Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning
- Injury eg. as a result of gas explosion or fire

## Indicators of faults

- Black soot or stain marks on gas appliance
- Yellow or orange lazy flame on gas fire - it should be 'crisp' and blue
- Excessive condensation
- High level of particulates eg from solid fuel & wood stoves

## Action:

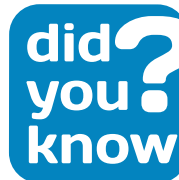
- Install a carbon monoxide detector
- Have gas appliances checked regularly by qualified installers who must be listed on [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)
- Sweep & clean out chimneys, flues and solid fuel appliances regularly

## Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning

CO is an odourless, colourless gas. Symptoms are similar to many other conditions and include

- Drowsiness/dizziness
- Headaches & nausea
- Confusion
- Tiredness
- Chest pains/ breathing problems

Exposure to even low levels can cause brain damage or death



Around 4,000 people attend accident and emergency departments in England each year because of carbon monoxide poisoning

## Who can help?

Contact **EAC FirstStop** 0800 377 70 70 who can put you in touch with a local safety check provider such as an AgeUK or home improvement agency and advise on financial help.

**CO and Gas Safety Society**  
[co-gassafety.co.uk](http://co-gassafety.co.uk) and **CO Awareness**  
[covictim.org](http://covictim.org) offer further information and support victims.

# A-Z of National Information

## Home Repairs & Adaptations

**Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs)** [wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com](http://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com) 0845 864 5210

HIAs offer help to organise & carry out home repairs, adaptations and related practical work on home eg. home safety, handyvan. **Foundations** can put you in touch with your local HIA.

**Disabled Living Foundation** [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk) 0300 999 0004

Advice about equipment, adaptations & services to make living independently at home safer.

**Which?** [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) Run a Trusted Trader scheme.

**TrustMark** [www.trustmark.org.uk](http://www.trustmark.org.uk) is a government endorsed Trusted Trader scheme.

*Your local Trading Standards/HIA or AgeUK may also run a Trusted Trader scheme.*

## Energy Advice

**The Energy Saving Trust** 0300 123 1234 or 0800 512 012

Provides advice and information on energy efficiency programmes and financial support.

**Neighbourhood Energy Action** [www.nea.org.uk/advice](http://www.nea.org.uk/advice)

Aims to eradicate fuel poverty. Range of practical information available on website.

## General Advice for Older People

**AgeUK** [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk) Advice Line: 0800 169 6565

Wide range of free information - Tel advice, website, Factsheets and via local AgeUK groups.

**Independent Age** [www.independentage.org.uk](http://www.independentage.org.uk) Advice Line: 0800 319 6789

Free Tel advice, factsheets & website on home care, care homes and many related matters.

**Turn 2 Us** [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk) Advice Line: 0808 802 2000

Help to access welfare benefits, charitable grants & financial help online, by phone via partners.

**Citizens Advice (CAB)** On-line Advice Guide: [www.adviceguide.org.uk/](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/)

Local CAB provide free advice on a wide range of subjects via website and local bureau.

## Housing & Care Options Advice

**EAC FirstStop** [www.firststopadvice.org.uk](http://www.firststopadvice.org.uk) Advice Line: 0800 377 70 70

Free advice & information about all aspects of accommodation, care & support via tel advice, factsheets, website and personalised housing & care options reports.

LOCAL INFORMATION (Also available from your council, library or CAB)

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Care & Repair England is a Charitable Industrial & Provident Society (IPS Reg No 25121R) which aims to improve older people's housing. [www.careandrepair-england.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk). Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this report is correct at time of publication. The producers and sponsors do accept any responsibility for errors or omissions. Copyright © Care & Repair England 2014.