

Tavistock Area Support Services

Hints to stay Warm and Safe this Winter

Tavistock has a higher number of older people living within its area than most other areas of the Country. One of the main causes is cold, damp homes and, as winter sets in, many older people are worried about heating costs.

There has been a 40% hike in energy bills since 2003 almost 2.4m older people live in homes that are cold enough to cause illness.

It is estimated that over 1.4m households containing someone over the age of 65 are without proper heating or insulation.

This year could see even more deaths if the Met Office's dire warnings of the coldest winter for over a decade come to pass. So what can be done to help the 10m over 65s in the UK cope?

1. Look after yourself

- Eat for warmth - regular hot meals and hot drinks provide warmth and energy.
- Keep moving, don't sit still - any activity, even vacuuming gets circulation going and makes you feel warmer.
- Think about what you wear - dress appropriately and wrap up warmly, indoors and out. Ideally several layers of thin clothing.
- Keep your home at the right temperature - it should be around 21 Celsius (70 Fahrenheit).
- Keep warm at night - wearing the right clothing to bed is as important as wrapping up outdoors.
- Get a flu jab - every year the flu virus changes, so reduce the risk and get your jab.

2. Keep on top of your benefits

Keep up-to-date with what help older people are entitled to this winter.

3. Keep your home warm

- **Central heating** - turn it on, check that it works properly, no leaks or blockages, or get it serviced. If it's a gas appliance, make sure you contact a CORGI registered installer. This means they have been approved by the National Watchdog for Gas Safety. Appliances should also be checked for safety annually.
- **Electric blankets** - anything 10 years old or more should be replaced if possible and certainly serviced in line with manufacturers' guidelines.
- **Sticking aluminium foil** down the back of a radiator close to the wall increase the radiator's efficiency, reflecting the heat back into the room.
- **Insulation:** pipes might need lagging, and heat is lost through draughty doors and windows. Cheap and easy-to-use draft excluders are available in DIY stores.
- **The letterbox** can let in loads of cold air, especially when newspapers are left in them. Banish the breeze with a brush-type cover for the letterbox.
- **Open keyholes** also let in loads of cold air. Room temperature can drop ten degrees in one hour. The simple way to remedy this is to buy a little round metal flap - or escutcheon plate - to cover the hole.
- **Stopcocks.** Turn them regularly to make sure they work and haven't seized up. An insurance company won't pay out if your home is flooded because you're not able to turn off the stopcock in the event of a burst main.
- **Use a luggage label** to identify stopcocks, so you can quickly isolate water pipes if you do suffer a burst.
- If you have **outdoor taps** for the garden, make sure you turn off the supply to the outside tap in the winter to prevent the water freezing up all the way into the house.

For more advice call The National Home Heat Help line on 0800 33 66 99 (Mon - Fri - 9am to 8pm, Sat - 10am to 3pm)

This helpline will be able to assist vulnerable people in a number of ways, including:

- Identifying grants that are available to make homes more energy efficient

- Arranging alternative payment methods that will suit the caller's circumstances
- Carrying out a benefits check up to ensure they are receiving maximum income
- Accessing a priority service team in each electricity and gas supplier to provide specialist advice
- Linking with other support agencies

The Home Heat Helpline is staffed by expert advisors, including former health professionals, who are trained to give advice on how to stay warm during cold weather. They will also be trained and authorised to deal with intermediaries calling on behalf of vulnerable customers, such as friends, carers, social workers or health visitors.