

# Keep Well and Warm



This booklet contains advice, information and support schemes to help you keep well and warm.

[www.wellandwarm.ie](http://www.wellandwarm.ie)

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## Introduction

Cold weather can be a problem for anyone, especially older people, children, people with a disability and those with long-term illness.

This booklet brings together all the information and support available to householders who may experience difficulties keeping well and warm during winter.

# Keeping well

## Eating well

Food is fuel. It helps keep you warm.

- ✓ **Have at least one hot meal a day.**
- ✓ **Have hot drinks throughout the day and one before bedtime.**
- ✓ **Eat fresh fruit and vegetables every day.**
- ✓ **Keep stocked up on basic food for the days when you may be unable to get out to the shops or do not feel like cooking. Consider cooking extra portions of dinner that you can freeze for another meal. Tinned and frozen foods are other healthy options to keep in stock.**

**TIP: Most supermarkets and some grocery shops can deliver your shopping to you. Check with your local store and keep their phone number.**

## Meals on wheels

This service provides a hot meal to people of any age who are unable to cook for themselves or have no other way of getting a hot meal. It is available in lots of areas around the country. Ask your public health nurse or GP for details of your local service.



## Keeping active

- ✓ **Walk around the house regularly.**
- ✓ **If you have difficulty walking or moving your arms and legs, wiggle your fingers and toes while sitting.**

## Keeping warm

- ✓ **Wear several layers of light clothes instead of one thick layer.**
- ✓ **Wear clothes made from wool, cotton or fleecy synthetic fibres.**
- ✓ **Wear thermal underwear during the winter.**
- ✓ **In very cold weather:**
  - **sleep with warm bedding and warm pyjamas or night dress,**
  - **wear bed socks and a night cap, and**
  - **keep a flask with a hot drink by your bed.**

## Keeping your home warm

Use a room temperature monitor card (included in this booklet) to make sure your house is warm enough. If the temperature falls below 16°C you could be at risk of hypothermia (when your body gets too cool to function properly).

- ✓ **Keep the living room warm throughout the day (21°C if active, 24°C if inactive).**
- ✓ **Have heavy well-fitted curtains. Close them in the evening.**
- ✓ **Heat your bedroom before going to bed and make sure the room is warm before you get up in the morning.**
- ✓ **Close internal doors and do not leave windows open for long periods.**
- ✓ **Draught proof around windows, external doors and letter box flaps to keep in heat. Make sure there is enough ventilation if you are using a natural gas or solid fuel fire in a room.**

## Health advice

Coldness can lead to an increase in chest infections, including influenza and pneumonia and other health problems.

### Signs and symptoms of hypothermia

Hypothermia happens when the body temperature drops below normal. If you have a number of the following symptoms, you could be at risk of hypothermia.

- ✓ **Not feeling cold, even when the temperature is low**
- ✓ **Drowsiness**
- ✓ **Slurred speech**
- ✓ **Feeling unsteady when moving**
- ✓ **Pale and puffy face**
- ✓ **Feeling confused**
- ✓ **Cold skin in areas that are normally covered by clothing, for example stomach, armpits and so on.**

### Flu injection

The best time to have your flu injection is in September or October. Protection lasts for a year, so you should get it annually. The injection is free and available from your GP (there may be a GP fee for non-medical card holders).

### Out-of-hours GP services

The GP out-of-hours service **is an urgent medical service** provided by doctors and nurses outside normal practice hours. The service runs from 8pm to 8am, Monday to Friday, and all

day Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays. If you have a medical card or a GP Visit Card, the service is free. If not, the doctor will charge a fee for the visit. Medical advice given by nurses or doctors over the phone is free of charge.

Call the HSE Information Line **1850 241 850** to find your local service.

If you depend on medical equipment at home, such as home kidney dialysis or oxygen machines, make sure to tell **ESB Customer Supply**. They will place you on their medical register. **Phone: 1850 372 372**

**If you live alone and feel ill, let someone know.**

**If you have been in hospital, before you go home, ask a nurse to ring a friend or relative who can heat your home and get in some food.**



## Energy advice

### Free electricity, gas and fuel allowances

The Department of Social and Family Affairs' Household Benefits Package contributes about €540 a year towards the electricity, natural gas or bottled gas bills for eligible households.

The **Electricity Allowance** covers your domestic standing charge, 400 units of electricity per bill and VAT on both. If you do not use your full allowance in one billing period, you can carry over up to 1200 units in total to your next bill.

The **Natural Gas Allowance** covers normal standing charges and gas kilowatt hours equal in value to that of the Electricity Allowance.

The **Bottled Gas Allowance** is available if your home is not connected to an electricity or natural gas supply.

You may be entitled to a **Fuel Allowance** if you are receiving a social welfare payment. It is worth €640 a year, paid at €20 a week for 32 weeks from September to April. If you qualify and live in a listed smokeless area, you may receive an additional amount of €3.90 a week.

The **Household Benefits Package** also provides payment towards your telephone bills and covers the cost of your TV Licence.

### How to submit your meter reading

If the meter reader is unable to gain access to your meter, he/she will leave a card. If necessary, ask a family member or friend to help you read your meter and follow the instructions on the card to submit the reading.

## Save money on your energy bills

- ✔ Buy heaters that are controlled by a thermostat, as they use energy more efficiently.
- ✔ Fit a good lagging jacket to your hot water cylinder. It will keep water warmer for longer.
- ✔ During very cold weather, it may be cheaper to heat just one room and use it for living and sleeping. Get your family or friends to prepare a bed in the living area.
- ✔ Have a timer fitted to your immersion heater and only set it for the required time to heat the water when you need it.
- ✔ Use energy saver CFL light bulbs – they use 80% less electricity than ordinary bulbs.

Check [www.powerofone.ie](http://www.powerofone.ie) for further tips on saving energy.

## Warmer Homes Scheme

If you find it hard to afford to keep your home warm and comfortable or to pay the fuel and electricity bills, you could benefit from the help available through the Warmer Homes Scheme. This scheme is delivered mainly through community organisations and is co-ordinated and part-funded by Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI).

The Warmer Homes Scheme provides the following services:

- ✔ Draught proofing
- ✔ Attic insulation
- ✔ Lagging jacket
- ✔ Low energy light bulbs
- ✔ Cavity wall insulation, where appropriate and available.



## Who can apply?

The scheme is for householders who receive Fuel Allowance, Disability Benefit or Invalidity Benefit. Services are provided either free of charge or for a small fee (about €100).

**Please contact 1800 250 204 for more information and to find your nearest provider.**

## Housing Aid for Older People

This scheme is managed by local authorities and aims to assist older people in carrying out essential repairs and improvements to their homes.

Funding is available for varied works, which may include:

- ✓ **structural repairs or improvements,**
- ✓ **re-wiring,**
- ✓ **repairing or replacing windows and doors, and**
- ✓ **providing water, sanitary services, heating, insulation, cleaning, painting and so on.**

The amount of grant you may receive depends on your household income. The maximum grant available is €10,500. The full cost of works is available to those with annual household income of less than €30,000. This reduces in stages to 30% of the approved cost of works for those with annual household incomes of €54,001 to €65,000.

Contact your local authority directly to apply.

## Difficulty paying fuel bills?

If you are experiencing payment difficulties, contact your natural gas or electricity supplier straight away. All suppliers offer different payment arrangements. You should be able to put in place a payment plan that you and your supplier can accept. Sometimes a pre-payment meter may be fitted at your home to allow you to remain on gas or electricity while repaying a debt and prevent you building up any further debt.

Electricity and gas suppliers will not disconnect\* your supply for non-payment of bills from November to March if you are on the industry Special Services Register and:

- ✓ **aged 66 years or over,**
- ✓ **living alone or with another elderly person, or**
- ✓ **living with a minor.**

To register, contact your supplier directly.

\*Please note that these registers cannot cover situations where there is an unexpected power failure in the network.

## What one unit of electricity can buy you:

Instantaneous electrical shower	7 – 10 mins
Immersion water heater	15 – 20 mins
Cooker (1 large ring)	
Kettle	20 – 40 mins
Tumble Dryer	
Toaster (2 slice)	40 – 60 mins
Washing machine	
Dishwasher	70 – 100 mins
Desktop computer (including monitor)	4 – 6 hours
TV 28"	7 – 9 hours
100 watt ordinary light bulb	10 hours
20 watt energy saving (CFL) light bulb	50 hours

The figures above give an average usage guide.  
Actual usage will depend on the age and efficiency of appliances.

# Safety and security at home

## Home safety

- ✓ **If you have an open fire, use a fire guard at all times.**
- ✓ **Do not hang clothes near a fire.**
- ✓ **If you have an electric under-blanket, always switch it off before you get into bed.**
- ✓ **Never fill a hot water bottle with boiling water and make sure you put it in a cover.**
- ✓ **Never use a hot water bottle with an electric blanket.**
- ✓ **Never smoke in bed.**
- ✓ **Leave a low energy light on over night in the hall or stairs area to avoid accidents.**
- ✓ **Make sure there is enough ventilation if you are using a natural gas or solid fuel fire in a room. Consider installing a carbon monoxide alarm close by.**

## Smoke alarms

Make sure you fit smoke alarms where you can clearly hear them. This means both upstairs and downstairs in a two-storey house. Get a friend or family member to test the alarm batteries regularly. Use alarms that have both a sound and light signal.

## Power cuts

In case of a power cut, have a torch beside your bed and in your living room. Check batteries regularly. You can contact ESB Networks for the latest information on when your electricity will be restored on **1850 372 999**.

## Home security

- ✓ **Never let strangers into your home. Ask for identification first – if you are not sure, do not let them in.**
- ✓ **Do not employ workmen that call to your door.**
- ✓ **Do not keep large amounts of money at home.**
- ✓ **Fit timing switches to your lighting and consider installing extra security lighting.**

## Personal alarms

- ✓ **There may be a personal alarm service in your area. If you would like to get one, contact your local community services or ask your public health nurse, doctor or local Garda.**
- ✓ **Get a relative or friend to check that it is working.**
- ✓ **If you have a personal alarm make sure to wear it at all times.**

**Do not hesitate to ring the personal alarm service in your area. Someone is available to answer your call 24 hours a day.**



## Scheme of Community Support for Older People

The Scheme of Community Support for Older People provides grants for community groups, such as Community Alert or Neighbourhood Watch, to support them in improving the security of their older members. Funding is now available for the following security equipment:

- ✓ **socially-monitored alarms,**
- ✓ **window locks, door locks and door chains,**
- ✓ **security lighting,**
- ✓ **smoke alarms, and**
- ✓ **interior emergency lighting on off-shore islands.**

Further information can be obtained from the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs who can be contacted at **071 910 7821 / 7819.**

Applications can be made at any time of year.

**Be a good neighbour – be aware and check on your neighbours. Do not leave it to others – they may have left it to you.**



## Financial and Other Support Services

### Money Advice and Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free and confidential service for people who have problems managing debts and money. The 65 MABS offices in Ireland have professional money advisers who can assist people by:

- ✓ **checking their income to make sure they are getting all their entitlements such as social welfare payments,**
- ✓ **contacting creditors (people or businesses that are owed money) with offers of payment if they are not able to do it themselves, and**
- ✓ **helping clients decide on the best way to make the payments and making out a budget.**

You can contact MABS through:

- ✓ **its MABS National Telephone Helpline 1890 283 438 (1890 BUDGET)**
- ✓ **its website [www.mabs.ie](http://www.mabs.ie)**
- ✓ **the network of local MABS companies (see your local phone directory for addresses).**

### Society of St Vincent De Paul (SVP)

SVP volunteers work confidentially with people in need to help them if they are unable to pay for fuel. If you are struggling with household bills and energy costs, SVP can provide advice and support, including payments for gas, electricity, oil and solid fuel costs. If you need assistance, visit the SVP website, [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie), or call **855 0022 (if you live in Dublin) or (01) 838 6990 (if you live outside Dublin).**

**This booklet is also available in Irish.  
If you would like a copy,  
contact Sustainable Energy Ireland  
on 1850 376 666**



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Fedhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



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