

Embec Care Ltd The Wise Choice Fact sheet

Helping service users stay warm

Keeping warm in winter for the elderly person who lives alone can often be a problem. The cost of keeping the home warm often causes anxiety to the person if they are on a limited income.

The government provides financial help to every person in the UK that is on a state pension, who will receive a 'Winter Fuel Payment' which at present is between £100 and £300 depending on age and circumstances. Please ask service user if they are getting help for Winter Fuel Payments.

It is important to prevent elderly people from becoming very cold. Family, friends and neighbours should look out for those who might be at risk from the cold, as hypothermia can set in quickly for the inactive person.

Keeping warm in winter to prevent hypothermia setting in is the biggest problem from sitting in a cold environment, and occurs when more heat is lost from the body than it can generate. It is usually caused by extended exposure to the cold, and where the body temperature drops to below 35 degrees (normal body temperature is 37 degrees).

In hypothermia, the usual responses of the body like shivering are not enough to maintain body temperature, and energy reserves are drained. When body energy is exhausted and hypothermia sets in, this then becomes a life-threatening situation. As this can happen very quickly hypothermia must be seen and treated as a medical emergency.

The person may not actually feel cold, but sitting in a cold room and being inactive especially for long periods, with little or no heating, this person may well run the risk of becoming hypothermic or become ill with cold-related illnesses like bronchitis or pneumonia.

Signs of Hypothermia

Cold room or house

Slurred speech

Abnormally slow rate of breathing

Cold, pale skin especially under clothes

Fatigue, lethargy or apathy

Sleepiness and confusion

Slow reactions

What to do if hypothermia is suspected

If possible take the person's temperature, if it registers at 35 degrees or below then it looks like hypothermia has set in and a doctor or the emergency services should be called in.

While waiting for help to arrive, try to move the person to a warmer environment, if this is not possible then several warm blankets or a duvet should be wrapped lightly around the person, if possible give warm drinks.

Even body heat from another person would help if nothing else was available. Any of these actions will help to avoid more heat loss from the body.

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What not to do

Do not rub any parts of the body to try and warm it up, as this could do more harm than good, as the body needs to be warmed up from the inside out.

Do not subject the person to any sudden extreme change of temperature.

Do not put them next to a fire or give them hot water bottles or heavy layers of clothes or blankets.

Do not give them alcohol, as it will stimulate further heat loss through the skin.

Chances for recovery depend on how long a person was exposed to the cold and his or her general health.

Guidelines for keeping warm in winter

Keep moving:

Get your circulation going by getting up and moving around every now and again, this makes you feel warmer. If it is too cold to go out, do some cleaning around the house like vacuuming the carpet, dusting the furniture, anything to keep you moving to keep warm.

If getting up and moving around causes you difficulty then some armchair exercises will help. Try moving your arms, legs, shoulders and feet around every 30 minutes just for a minute or two, this will help to keep the circulation in the body moving.

Here are a few exercises to try, not only will they help to keep you warm but will help with mobility and fitness.

Feet and Toes

Lift your feet a few inches off the floor a couple of inches and wiggle your toes.

Now, slowly lower your legs to floor then slowly raise them back up until the knee joint is locked. Repeat a few times.

Keeping your feet off the floor, extend your legs and push your feet forward as if pointing at something in the distance with your toes, hold for a few seconds then pull your feet back, pointing the toes towards the ceiling.

Put both feet back on the floor, hip width apart, and come up onto the balls of your feet, lifting your heels off the floor. Hold for a few seconds then relax and repeat a few times.

With your feet flat on the floor, lift one foot at a time and slowly rotate your ankles around in small circles (both directions) to loosen off any excess tension.

Legs

After your feet move your attention to your lower legs and calf muscles.

Sit up straight and tense the lower leg muscles, holding for a few seconds, feeling the various muscles contract before relaxing. Repeat three times.

Relax and bring your attention to the upper legs. Tense the upper leg muscles and hold for a few seconds, Repeat three times, again building up the tension to your maximum each time.

Sit with your feet hip width apart and come up onto the balls of your feet, lifting your heels off the floor. Push your legs down as if trying to push your heels back onto the floor, whilst resisting and tensing the legs so that the heels don't actually go back to the floor. Relax and repeat several times.

Next, sit with your feet hip width apart, but with your knees together. Start squeezing your knees together

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and tense your upper leg muscles. Do this several times, gradually building with each one up to your maximum effort.

Stay in the same position, but this time put your hands on the outside of your knees. Push outwards, trying to open your knees apart, but resist with your hands so that they don't open. Start slowly, building to your maximum effort.

Hands

Wiggle your fingers quickly for a few seconds on both hands.

Then open and close your hands quickly, extending your fingers to the maximum and making a fist each time you close your hand.

Relax your hands and wrists and give them a good shake – as if you've just washed them then realized there is nothing to dry them on.

Stop shaking and gently bend and rotate your wrists through their full range of movement. Add light pressure by gently pushing the hand forward and back from the wrist with the opposite hand.

When we say the upper body, we're talking arms, shoulders, chest and back.

Raise both arms horizontally, out to your sides, and shoulder height as if you were doing an impression of an aeroplane. Push out your arms in both directions, reaching as far out as physically possible, feeling the stretch across your back and chest.

Relax from this stretch but keep your arms out straight and start to move them very slowly in small circles as if running your finger around the outside rim of a coin. Do ten small circles forward, then ten small circles backwards.

Relax the arms and shake them off.

Put both hands together as if you have just clapped, hold them out in front of you, elbows raised and push your hands together as hard as you can, tensing your arms, chest, shoulders and back for 10 seconds – when you do this properly your upper body will physically start to shake with the effort.

Put both hands together behind your back, palms together and again push to your maximum effort, tensing your arms, chest, and shoulders and back for 10 seconds.

Neck and head

Move your attention to your head and neck. Your neck and spine are very delicate and should only ever be exercised slowly and gently, and without tension, particularly when rotating the head in a circular motion. Never force movements, and don't do anything that hurts.

Slowly drop your head forward, taking your chin to your chest for a few seconds.

Bring your head back to its normal position then take it slowly backwards. Again, hold for a few seconds.

With the head tilted back, drop your mouth open and slowly close again, pushing the chin forward.

Perform several times.

Bring head back to normal centre position, looking forward. Look to the left side, hold for a few seconds, then change to the right side and hold for a few seconds.

Bring your head back to its normal position, drop your chin to the chest and slowly role your head in a gentle, relaxed circular motion. Do this several times in both directions, slowly easing out any tensions and stiffness.

Well done, you've finished.

You can perform armchair exercises anywhere

Try to keep a regular routine to help you stick with these exercises. Maybe you could perform them

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every time a certain TV programme is on, or at a particular time of the day, whatever suits you best and whatever keeps you in a good routine.

Do these simple, exercises regularly and you'll soon notice a increase in your strength, flexibility and mobility. And believe me, once you've started to build these energising attributes, you'll want to keep them

Eating a hot meal every day

During cold weather, regular hot meals and hot drinks will provide warmth and energy. If you can't cook, find out from Social Services about getting 'meals on wheels', so that you have at least one proper meal a day.

A balanced diet of foods rich in proteins, vitamins and minerals, such as potatoes, beans, bread, milk, eggs, meat and fish, are all good sources of energy and will help keep you healthy.

Fresh fruit and vegetables will also help.

Dress for warmth

Warm clothes for both indoors and out are very important. Several layers of thin clothing are better than one thick layer, as this will keep you warm by trapping air between them.

Wool, polyester or fleecy synthetic fibres or fabrics are usually warmer. Keep your limbs warm by wearing thick woollen tights or socks plus a warm pair of slippers for your feet.

Thermal underwear has the benefit to absorb, store, and release body heat to help keep the body temperature just right. A blanket over the knees and shoulders will provide a lot of warmth.

Wear a woollen hat on your head, where a lot of heat can be lost.

When going out of the house, make sure that you are dressed for the weather, it can be a lot colder than it looks, the wind chill can make it very cold indeed.

In the winter, it is best to wear several warm layers of clothes under your coat, and to cover your head and ears with a hat. Warm shoes or boots with ribbed soles are important especially if it is slippery or wet, and will help to save you from falling over if it is icy. Always change out of any wet clothing when you get home.

Keeping your home warm in winter

It is important to keep the room that you live and sleep in warm enough.

It would be ideal to have heating in your bedroom during the night when the weather is cold. If due to costs this isn't possible, try to make sure your bedroom is warm when going to bed. or failing this, ask someone to move your bed or chair into one room while the weather is cold, keeping this room warm all the time.

The best temperature to live and sleep in is 21 degrees Celsius. If the temperature falls below 16 degrees Celsius, you could be at risk of hypothermia, heart attack or a stroke, especially if you are elderly.

To help keep your home warm and save on heating, make sure that your home is free of draughts from windows and doors.

Self-adhesive foam or rubber strips can be easily stuck to doors and window frames, there are also brush strips that can be attached to surfaces that move against each other, such as patio doors and

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Insulation

A lot of heat can be lost through your roof. You can cut this down by insulating your loft. Cavity wall insulation helps to keep the cold from coming into the house and at the same time keeping the heat in. This needs to be done professionally and can be expensive, but in the long term will save money on heating bills.

Double glazing

Most modern houses come with double glazing to the windows and this helps to cut down on loss of heat. If the house that you live in does not have double glazing, then plastic sheeting can be fixed on the window frames with adhesive tape, which will help to keep out draughts and the cold. For an older person this may not be an easy job and potentially unsafe to go climbing up at windows, so get a family member or friend to do this.

Heavy curtains that reach down to the floor will also help to keep out the cold and insulate the windows. If you have radiators under the windows, don't let the curtains hang in front of them. Tuck them behind the radiators so that the heat comes into the room.

Central heating

If you have central heating make sure it is checked at least once a year, preferably before the winter sets in. If the heating has been off over the summer months the radiators may have got air in them causing cold spots at the top, if this is the case then they will need to be bled to remove the air and make the heating efficient again. If you don't know how to do this ask someone to do it for you.

For older houses with not much insulation on the outside walls, a good trick to keep the heat from your radiators inside the house, is to place heat reflectors behind them. You can buy radiator foil, or simply use ordinary kitchen foil with the shiny side facing towards the back of the radiator.

If you can afford to do it, turn the thermostat down a degree or two, and keep the heating on low all the time, it has been said that by doing this it is more cost efficient than turning it on and off several times a day.

If because of finances it would be too expensive to do this, then make sure that the house is warm when you get out of bed in the morning and go to bed at night, when it is cold make sure the bedroom window is closed at night.

Keeping warm in bed at night is important. A hot water bottle or an electric blanket will keep you warm, but do not use both together, if a hot water bottle were to leak for some reason when there was an electric blanket on the bed then the danger of being electrocuted would be a reality, never use the two together for this reason.

It is important to wear warm clothing when in bed - thermal underwear, pyjamas, bed socks and even a woollen hat will all help keep you warm right through the night.

Several layers of light bed clothes or a winter duvet will trap warm air from your body to help to keep you warm.

A warm drink at bed time can also help and, if you feel cold during the night, a flask of hot milk by your bedside can help to warm you up.