

Home safety



How to spot risks and
prevent accidents



Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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About this guide

Most of us spend a lot of time at home and we all want to feel safe there. Although more accidents happen in the home than anywhere else, you can keep yourself from harm by being aware of danger areas and unsafe habits.

This guide can help you identify some of the common hazards in your home and advise you on preventive measures. There are some simple checks you can do yourself. You can also get help to keep you safe and well.

We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout.

In this guide, you'll find references to our other publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789**, or by visiting **independentage.org/publications**.

How safe is your home?

There are some simple measures you can put in place to keep you safe at home. Take this quick quiz to see how safety-conscious you are.

1. Are your hall and stairs well lit and free from clutter?
2. Do you have any handrails in the bathroom and on the stairs?
3. Are all your carpets and rugs secured down?
4. Have you got working smoke alarms on every floor?
5. Have you got a fire escape plan?
6. Do you know when the electrics in your home were last checked?
7. Has your boiler or solid fuel heater been serviced in the last year?
8. Have you got a carbon monoxide alarm?
9. Do you know where to find your:
 - mains water stopcock or stop tap – this turns off the cold water
 - fuse box
 - electricity meter
 - gas meter?
10. Can you get to them easily?

If you could answer 'yes' to most of these questions straight away, you probably are quite safety-conscious but there may be some hazards you're not aware of. If you were unsure about any of these, you can find advice to help you improve your home safety in the following chapters.

Getting help

Sometimes it can be hard to spot hazards when you're used to living with them every day. You could ask friends or family to help you carry out a home safety check and there are other sources of help.

Most local fire services offer free Safe and Well visits (also called home fire safety checks) if you meet the criteria. They'll identify potential fire risks in your home, advise you how to minimise those risks and work out a fire escape plan with you. They may fit smoke alarms or test any that you have. Contact your local fire and rescue service to book a visit. You can find their contact details in the phone directory or on the Chief Fire Officers Association website cfoa.org.uk. Safe and Well visits may also include advice on falls prevention and your health and wellbeing.

If you've recently had a fall or you're at risk of having one, you may be offered a home hazard assessment. Ask your GP or local council if you think you need one. If the assessment is available in your area, a trained professional, such as an occupational therapist, will visit you at home to identify possible risks and advise you how to deal with them. They'll also look at how you move around in your home.

You can also request a free care needs assessment from your council if you need more help at home or you think you need aids or adaptations to help you stay safe. This might include telecare, such as alarms, movement sensors or pill dispensers.



Help with home maintenance and repairs

You can find reliable tradespeople through Trustmark, a government-backed scheme (0333 555 1234, trustmark.org.uk/find-a-tradesman) or ask your friends and neighbours for recommendations. Your local Home Improvement Agency may be able to help make sure your home is safe (0300 124 0315, findmyhia.org.uk), and your local Age UK may offer a handyman service (0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/handyman-services).

Our factsheet **Paying for home maintenance and repairs** has information about help and grants that may be available to you.

If you want to know more about protecting your home from crime, see our guide **Home security**.

If you rent

Landlords have some legal responsibilities for health and safety in your home. All landlords have a duty to make sure that the gas supply and wiring in rental homes is safe. They should arrange regular safety checks by a registered electrician for any electrical appliances they provide. They must get a registered Gas Safe engineer to carry out an annual safety inspection on all gas appliances they provide. They must also make sure that any furniture they supply at the start of the tenancy meets safety standards – for example, upholstered furniture must be fire resistant.

Private landlords must fit working smoke alarms on each floor. They should also fit a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a solid fuel burning appliance. You are responsible for checking that the alarms work during your tenancy.

If you're concerned about the safety of your rented property, seek advice. Contact Citizens Advice (**03444 111444**, [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)). If you feel you may be a risk of harm, you could call Shelter (**0808 800 4444**, [shelter.org.uk](https://www.shelter.org.uk)).

Avoiding falls

Anyone can have a fall, but as we get older the risk of falling increases. This can be for a number of reasons and often it's a combination of factors. Certain health conditions, the side effects of some medications, changes to your sight, or hearing problems – which may also affect your balance – and even fear of falling can all make you more vulnerable to falls.

Most falls don't result in serious injury but they can affect your confidence. Being prepared can make it easier to avoid falls or deal with them effectively if they do happen.



Look after yourself

If you're physically active, you're less likely to have a fall. Try to do some regular exercise such as swimming or dancing to improve your balance and muscle strength. Speak to your GP if you haven't exercised in a while or have a disability. They might be able to give you exercises to do at home or recommend local exercise classes such as Extend ([01582 832760](tel:01582832760), extend.org.uk). Your local council may have information about exercise groups in your area. Keeping active may also reduce your fear of falling.

Make sure you have regular hearing and eye tests. You can get free eye tests every two years if you're over 60, or more frequently if advised to by an optician. Action on Hearing Loss has a telephone hearing test ([0844 800 3838](tel:08448003838), actiononhearingloss.org.uk) and your GP can arrange a hearing test.

Take care of your feet. Talk to your GP to find out if you're eligible for free NHS foot care services or contact the College of Podiatry to find a registered chiropodist in your area ([020 7234 8620](tel:02072348620), cop.org.uk/find-a-podiatrist).

Make sure you eat a balanced diet to help keep your bones strong. It should include calcium-rich food, such as cheese and milk, and vitamin D. Taking supplements can be effective – ask your GP or pharmacist for advice.

Some medication can increase your risk of falls especially if you're taking more than one. If you're on medication, it's important to manage it well – see chapter 9.

Check for hazards in your home

Falls can easily happen around the home when you're reaching or bending for things, rushing for the toilet at night, or doing home maintenance, for example, but there are some simple things you can do to prevent them.

Do

- ✓ make sure your home is well lit
- ✓ keep your home clutter free – especially the hall, landing, doorways and stairs
- ✓ mop up any spillages straight away
- ✓ repair frayed carpet edges and secure loose carpets or flooring

- ✓ consider installing grab rails in the bathroom and a second handrail on the stairs
- ✓ have somewhere to sit in the bathroom or kitchen if you're prone to dizzy spells
- ✓ use a non-slip mat in the bath or shower
- ✓ look out for your pets underfoot.

Don't

- ✗ leave cables and wires trailing across the floor
- ✗ walk around in the dark – consider getting motion-activated lights
- ✗ leave things on the stairs
- ✗ use a stepladder if you're on your own or prone to dizzy spells – ask someone to help. Never stand on chairs.

You can get help to check for hazards – see chapter 1. An occupational therapist can also advise you about aids and adaptations to help with moving around your home or preventing a fall. You could consider getting telecare such as a personal alarm to call for help if you do have a fall.

If you have sight loss, the Thomas Pocklington Trust has a useful guide to improving lighting in your home ([020 8995 0880, pocklington-trust.org.uk/project/lighting-around-home-guide-better-lighting-people-sight-loss](https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/project/lighting-around-home-guide-better-lighting-people-sight-loss)).

Our factsheets **Adapting your home to stay independent** and **Technology to help you at home** have more information.

My mum fell out of bed and waited for hours to use her alarm because she didn't want to bother anyone. She was incredibly lucky to find she hadn't broken anything when the paramedics eventually got her to hospital. She did learn from the experience and used the alarm after that when she needed to.

Falls can have a serious impact on your health and wellbeing so don't ignore them. If you have a fall, talk to your GP or social worker.

There's a lot of help and support available. They may refer you to a falls clinic, for example, to find out why you fell and to get extra help to prevent it happening again, such as physiotherapy.

What to do if you have a fall

- Stay calm and don't try to move immediately.
- Make sure you're not hurt.
- Look for something stable to hold on to.
- Slowly get up.
- Sit for a while and rest.

If you can't get up:

- keep warm – reach for a blanket or cover yourself with a coat or rug
- try to keep moving to maintain circulation
- make some noise to attract attention
- if you have a personal alarm, use it!
Don't worry about bothering people
- if you don't have an alarm and can get to a phone, call 999.

Susan, 62

"I have rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, and I've lost strength in my muscles. On my birthday last year, I was standing in my bath, having a shower. I usually put the plug in and use the shower water to flush the loo. On this occasion I decided not to, and this may have saved me from drowning.

"I had forgotten to put the bathmat on the floor, so when I went to step out of the shower I slipped and fell back into the bath. Instead of a shower curtain I have a big screen made of glass. I grabbed the screen as I fell and it came away from its hinges and landed on top of me.

"I panicked. For two hours I was stuck in the bath and didn't have the strength to lift myself up. If you're trying to stand and haven't got any strength in your thigh muscles, you're jiggered. I was shouting at myself to get a grip.

"I wanted to stop myself panicking and drifting off. I knew my neighbours couldn't hear me scream. Finally, using my feet, I managed to get the shower screen away from me. I lifted myself

out of the bath and levered myself up using the sink.

“I was deeply shocked but the incident showed me how important personal safety is. Now I always make sure the bathmat is in place.



“I have a mobile phone with me wherever I am in the house so I can call people if I’m in distress. After the accident, I rented a personal alarm and had a coded key safe fitted outside my house so that trusted people can enter if I’m unable to walk.

“I didn’t want my fall to affect my confidence so I asked an occupational therapist to come round to assess my home. I would advise anyone concerned about falling to ask for help.”

Fire safety

Fires can start suddenly and spread quickly. Smoking, faulty electrical appliances, leaving cooking unattended, over-charging electrical equipment, and overloading sockets are some of the most common causes. Candles, electric blankets, coal fires and heaters are all possible sources of fires.

We become more vulnerable to fires as we get older. It can be difficult to keep up with home maintenance, and sensory impairments, such as loss of hearing, sight, smell or touch, can reduce our ability to detect fires. Reduced mobility, some medications, alcohol or substance misuse, and smoking are also risk factors.

Reducing the risk

Contact your local fire service to see if they can arrange a Safe and Well visit (also called a home fire safety visit). They will assess your home for risks and advise you on an escape plan. They may install smoke alarms. See chapter 1 for more information. You can also get fire safety tips from [gov.uk/fire-safety-in-the-home](https://www.gov.uk/fire-safety-in-the-home).



Alarms

Smoke alarms can detect a fire in its early stages and give you vital extra minutes to get out. You should have at least one on each floor. Test them regularly – about once a month – and keep them clean. Vacuum them gently with a soft brush attachment every three months. You could ask someone to help you if your smoke alarms are hard to reach. If you have a battery-powered smoke alarm, you should replace the batteries every year or you can buy alarms with 10-year sealed batteries. You should replace your smoke alarm every 10 years.

We had a free alarm and safety check from a fire safety officer. He replaced our outdated alarm and helped us plan our escape route. It was very informative.

You can get special smoke alarms if you have sight or hearing loss. Contact Action on Hearing Loss ([0808 808 0123](tel:08088080123), actiononhearingloss.org.uk), Sense ([0300 330 9256](tel:03003309256), sense.org.uk), the RNIB ([0303 123 9999](tel:03031239999), rnib.org.uk) or your local fire service to find out more. Your local fire service might fit these too.

Know your escape plan

Plan and practise an escape route and keep it free from clutter. Make sure there's nothing in corridors or on stairways that could block your way. If you have sight loss, you could mark your escape route out of your home with tactile indicators such as raised bumps. Contact the RNIB for more information.

Keep your walking stick or other mobility aid close by. You can register with your local fire service if you have sight, hearing or mobility issues or if you use oxygen. In an emergency, the fire crew who attend will be told about your situation.

Any closed door can hold back a fire. Close internal doors at night and when you go out.

If you smoke

Never leave cigarettes, cigars or pipes unattended and make sure you put them out properly in a deep ashtray. Falling asleep while smoking is one of the most common causes of smoking-related fires. Don't smoke if you're drowsy or anywhere you might fall asleep.

If you use e-cigarettes or vaping products, only buy them from reputable retailers and follow the manufacturers' instructions when charging them. Badly-made or counterfeit chargers have caused house fires.

Skin creams

If you use a paraffin-based skin cream or lotion, keep away from fire, flames and cigarettes to reduce the fire risk. If you have any concerns, or want to try a water-based product, ask your doctor for advice.

Before you go to bed

Many fires in the home start at night. Make it part of your routine to do a bedtime check.

- Close internal doors.
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances unless they're designed to be left on – your fridge for example. It's not enough just to switch them off at the socket.
- Check your cooker is turned off.
- Put candles and cigarettes out properly.
- Turn heaters off and put up fireguards.
- Make sure exits are clear.
- Keep door and window keys where everyone in your home can find them easily.

If you have one, keep a mobile phone within easy reach and make sure it's sufficiently charged.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service



What to do in an emergency

Get out, stay out and call 999

Fire Brigade

Try to stay calm. Don't attempt to put the fire out – leave it to the fire service. You can also call if you smell burning but don't know where it's coming from. Fire services have equipment that can detect sources of heat.

Electrical safety

Electricity can cause fires and electrical accidents can be fatal. You can avoid many risks by regularly checking your electrics for faults and using products safely.

Examine any cables for wear, especially if they're hidden behind furniture, and get your wiring checked by a registered electrician at least every 10 years. Keep all your gadgets and electrical appliances clean and in good working order to avoid electrical fires, and check the plugs and wires.

When you buy electrical appliances, make sure they have a British or European safety mark. Never try to fix appliances while they're still plugged in. Unplug appliances when you're not using them or at night. As well as preventing fires, switching off and unplugging them will save you electricity and money.

Water conducts electricity so you should never bring mains-powered appliances, such as heaters, hairdryers or radios, into a bathroom. Don't switch off a plug with wet hands.

Electric blankets and portable heaters

If you use an electric blanket, you should get it tested after three years and look out for signs of wear, such as scorch marks, worn flex or frayed material. Never use a hot water bottle and an electric blanket together, even if the blanket is switched off. Don't use an electric blanket if you have continence problems.

Portable heaters should be placed on a level surface at least a metre (three feet) away from anything that could catch fire. Don't use them to dry your clothes. And don't leave them on overnight or when you're not there.

Sockets and extension leads

Check your plugs and sockets for any damage. They shouldn't have burn marks, give off excessive heat or make crackling noises. The same goes for light fittings.

Don't overload sockets, extension leads or adaptors. Only use one extension lead per socket and never plug one extension lead into another. Appliances use different amounts of power so be careful how many you plug in. Don't try to repair damaged extension leads – get rid of them.

Electrical equipment such as fuse boxes and electricity meters are often located in a cupboard under the stairs where you might also store coats, ironing boards, and other things. Make sure you keep anything combustible away from this equipment and keep the cupboard door closed.

Check that you have RCD (residual current device) protection in your fuse box. This automatically switches off your electricity if there's a fault and can help to prevent fires. To see if an RCD is fitted, look for a device with a pushbutton marked T or Test on your fuse box.

Register your appliances

If you buy white goods – washing machines, fridges – register them with the manufacturer to be sure of receiving any product safety updates. You can register second-hand products as well. Contact the manufacturer directly or register them on registermyappliance.org.uk.

Some people use electrical appliances, such as washing machines, at night to take advantage of cheaper rates of electricity. The fire service advises against this because a fire at night can go unnoticed for longer and spread further.

You can get more advice and information from Electrical Safety First ([electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk](https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk)).



Gas, oil and solid fuel safety

Gas appliances such as fires, boilers, cookers and central heating systems must be properly installed and they should be serviced regularly and safety checked every year by a registered gas engineer. By law, all gas engineers must be on the Gas Safe Register (**0800 408 5500**, gassaferegister.co.uk). They carry ID which tells you what appliances they're qualified to work on.

If you've reached State Pension qualifying age and receive certain benefits, you may be able to get a free gas safety check from your supplier. Contact them and ask to be put on their Priority Services Register. You may also be eligible if you're disabled or have a long-term health condition.

If your appliance uses a solid fuel such as coal or wood, get it cleaned and serviced regularly by a HETAS registered installer (**01684 278170**, hetas.co.uk). If you use an oil appliance, contact OFTEC (**01473 626298**, oftec.org).

It's illegal to use a gas appliance if you know it to be unsafe. Turn it off and don't touch it until it's been inspected by a Gas Safe registered engineer. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) runs a free Gas Safety Advice Line if you need more information about gas safety (**0800 300 363**, [hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic](https://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic)). If you smell gas, call **0800 111 999**.

Ventilation

All gas appliances need enough air to work properly. Never block ventilation points, even if you feel they're draughty, and make sure the flue is kept clear at all times. If you can't see all or part of your flue, you can get inspection hatches or a carbon monoxide alarm fitted.

Get your chimney checked regularly to make sure it's not blocked so the fumes can go up and out. You can find a chimney sweep by contacting the National Association of Chimney Sweeps (**01785 336555**, [nacs.org.uk](https://www.nacs.org.uk)) or by asking friends and neighbours for a recommendation.

Carbon monoxide

If your gas, oil or solid fuel appliances don't burn properly, they can produce carbon monoxide, which is extremely dangerous. You can't see, smell or taste carbon monoxide but there may be some warning signs:

- a lazy yellow flame rather than a crisp blue one on your cooker
- black stains on or around appliances
- a pilot light that keeps going out
- increased condensation inside windows.



Breathing in carbon monoxide can give you symptoms similar to a cold, flu or food poisoning. These include headaches, drowsiness, feeling sick and vomiting, stomach pain, tiredness and confusion, dizziness and shortness of breath. Carbon monoxide poisoning can be fatal. It's especially dangerous when you're asleep and unaware of the early symptoms.

An audible carbon monoxide alarm can give you an early warning. You can buy them from DIY stores, supermarkets or from your energy supplier. If you buy one, make sure it has a Kitemark and complies with British safety standards.



The Kitemark shows that products have been independently safety tested.

You need to test the alarm regularly. Some smoke alarms for people who are deaf or hard of hearing include a carbon monoxide alarm with a vibrating or visual alert.

Even if you get your boiler serviced regularly, you still need a carbon monoxide alarm. An alarm isn't a substitute for getting your appliances serviced and tested.

What to do in an emergency

You need to act quickly if you smell gas or suspect there's a gas or carbon monoxide leak.

- Get fresh air – open all the doors and windows to ventilate the area.
- If you know where it is, shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve.
- Don't use electrical switches – for example, don't turn on the lights – as this can ignite gas.
- Extinguish all naked flames and do not smoke.
- Call the free 24-hour National Gas Emergency Helpline on **0800 111 999**.
- If you feel unwell, contact your GP or local hospital and tell them you may have been exposed to gas or carbon monoxide.

Any investigations or repairs should be carried out by a Gas Safe registered engineer.

Staying safe in the kitchen

Avoiding accidents

To avoid any unnecessary reaching or bending, rearrange your work surfaces so the things you use most are to hand. Keep counters near the cooker clear so you can put pans down easily. When you're cooking, try to use the back rings on the cooker or hob and make sure pan handles don't stick out so you don't knock them.

Try not to carry hot liquids too far and take care when you're carrying food – use a tray or a trolley. However, don't use a trolley as a walking aid unless it has built-in brakes.

Kitchen aids and adaptations

There are many small aids and gadgets that can help you stay safe in the kitchen, such as kettle tippers and reaching tools. If you're living with sight loss, you can get tactile labels with raised bumps for marking equipment, talking gadgets, special gloves, liquid level indicators, and oven shelf guards to help prevent burns and spills. You can get more information from the Disabled

Living Foundation (0300 999 0004, livingmadeeasy.org.uk) or the RNIB (0303 123 9999, rnib.org.uk).



If you think you'd benefit from adaptations, for example having your kitchen cupboards or work surfaces lowered, contact your local council to request a free care needs assessment involving an occupational therapist. See our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** for more information.

Fire prevention

The kitchen is the highest fire risk area in the home. More than half of accidental fires are started by cooking, often when cookers and grills are left unattended. When you're cooking, set a timer to remind you when food is ready. Keep anything flammable, such as paper, tea towels and cloths, away from the cooker and hob.

I had a minor chip pan fire. I was using a ceramic hob which always took a long time to heat up. I became distracted by something else and forgot about it. Now I never leave pans unattended.

It can be annoying if your smoke alarm goes off while you're cooking, but never take the battery out. If it keeps being activated, you may need to move the alarm. Heat alarms can detect the increase in temperature from a fire and they're

not sensitive to smoke so you can install them in kitchens. They only cover a relatively small area so you may need more than one.

Look after your appliances

A build-up of fat and grease on appliances is another major cause of fires so keep them as clean as possible. And avoid storing things on top of appliances, like a microwave, which can block ventilation. If you use one, only microwave things that say they're microwave safe. Never put metal items, tin foil, disposable plastic tubs or Styrofoam products in a microwave.

Don't position your toaster under overhanging cupboards and keep it away from anything that could catch fire, like curtains or kitchen rolls. Empty out crumbs and if your toast gets stuck, don't try to get it out while it's plugged in – especially not with a metal knife as there may be live parts.

You should defrost your fridge and freezer at least once a year to make sure they keep working properly.

Help with costs

Never use a cooker to heat a room. If you're struggling to afford heating bills, make sure you're getting your Winter Fuel Payment and any Cold Weather Payments you're eligible for. You may also be eligible for the Warm Home Discount Scheme – contact your energy supplier for information.

Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** for a benefits check or try our online calculator (independentage.org/benefit-calculator). Our free guide **Moneywise** has more suggestions for ways to boost your income and save money.

What to do in an emergency

If a pan catches fire, never throw water over it. Turn off the heat if you can, then leave the kitchen and close the door. Don't take any risks if there's a fire. Get out, stay out and dial 999.

See chapter 3 for more fire safety advice.

Food safety

More people get food poisoning at home than anywhere else. We're more vulnerable as we get older because our immune system weakens with age. Although rare, food poisoning can be life-threatening.

There are some simple ways you can keep yourself safe. The single most effective way to reduce the spread of infection is to wash your hands, especially before preparing food and after handling raw food like chicken. Don't wash your hands in the washing up water – use soap and running water.

Older people are particularly vulnerable to food poisoning caused by listeria bacteria, which may be found in chilled foods such as pre-packed sandwiches, pâté, soft cheeses like brie or camembert, cooked sliced meat and poultry, and smoked salmon. These foods should be eaten by their use-by dates, even if they look and smell okay. Don't be tempted to keep them longer to save money.

Any food can contain germs that you can't see, smell or taste. When you're cooking, make sure food is cooked all the way through. If you use a microwave, stir or turn the food halfway through its cooking time so that it cooks evenly. Use refrigerated leftovers within two days and don't reheat food more than once.

Keep your fridge below 5°C (41°F). Raw meat, fish or poultry should be stored at the bottom, below ready-to-eat food such as salad. Don't put open tins in the fridge – transfer the contents to a clean container and cover. Keep an eye on labels and throw out any food that's past its use-by date.



Other tips

- Make sure food surfaces are clean before and after you prepare food.
- Use a separate chopping board for raw food such as meat.
- Wash fruit and vegetables under cold running water.
- Don't wash raw meat before cooking it as this can spread bacteria to other food.

You can find more food hygiene information on the NHS website ([nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-prepare-and-cook-food-safely](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-prepare-and-cook-food-safely)).

What to do if you get food poisoning

Food poisoning can usually be treated at home. Rest as much as possible and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. When you feel up to it, eat bland food such as rice, toast and bananas.

If your symptoms are severe or last longer than a few days, contact your GP.

Water safety – avoiding floods and scalds

Indoor flooding

A bath or washbasin can quickly overflow if you leave it unattended. You can get devices that stop a bath or washbasin overflowing or sound a warning alarm if you've forgotten to turn the taps off. You might be able to get a flood detector, which can also alert you to burst pipes and leaks, as part of a telecare package (see chapter 1).

Make sure you know where your mains water stop tap (stopcock) is and how to use it. Keep it clear so you can get to it easily in an emergency.

Avoiding scalds

A scald may be caused by steam or hot water and the effects can be painful and long lasting. Older people have thinner skin, and you may not be able to tell how hot water is until you've been injured, because of medication or certain medical conditions, so it's important to take care.

Water in your hot tank is usually stored at 60°C (140°F) in order to kill bacteria but at this temperature it can burn, so it needs to be cooled before use. When you're running a bath, always run the cold water before the hot.

A thermostatic mixing valve (TMV) accurately controls the temperature of water and can reduce the risk of scalding. You can fit TMVs to the hot and cold pipework near your washbasin or bath at a relatively low cost. Contact Trustmark to find a reliable tradesperson ([0333 555 1234](tel:03335551234), trustmark.org.uk/find-a-tradesman) or ask your friends and neighbours for recommendations.

Hot water bottles

A hot water bottle can be a good way to keep warm but old or cheap ones can split easily. Only buy one that meets British safety standards. Check the bottle and stopper regularly for signs of wear and tear.

When you're filling your hot water bottle, allow the water to cool slightly. Don't use boiling water or water from the hot tap as this can cause the rubber to perish. Take care when you're filling it – it may help to cover the hot water bottle with a towel to avoid burns. Only fill it two-thirds and expel the air. Empty the hot water bottle when it's not in use.

Never use a hot water bottle and an electric blanket at the same time.

What to do in an emergency

If it's not serious, you may be able to treat a burn or scald at home. Burns and scalds are treated in the same way. Get away from the heat source to stop the burning. Keep the area under cool or lukewarm running water for 20 minutes. Don't use ice or iced water or any creams or greasy substances, like butter. If you need advice about a burn or a scald, you can call NHS 111 or contact your GP. Or speak to a pharmacist.

9 Managing your medication

If you have to take several different medications, it's important to manage them properly. Write a list of all your current medications, including any vitamins or supplements and take it with you to any healthcare appointments. You should also make a note of any allergies or intolerances.

If you're prescribed a new medication, ask about any side effects, when to take it, any instructions such as whether you should take it with food or avoid alcohol, and how it might be affected by other medications. You may be able to get extra help from your pharmacist through the free New Medicine Service. See our guide **Living well with long-term health conditions** for details.

Be aware that some side effects or taking a number of different kinds of medication can increase your risk of falls – see chapter 2.

Read the written information that comes with your medication and keep it in a safe place for future reference. You can also find information about your medication on the electronic Medicines Compendium (eMC) [medicines.org.uk/emc](https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc).



Make a plan

If you're taking a number of different medicines, consider writing a plan to keep track of what each one is for, when you need to take it, the dose or amount you need to take, any instructions, and when you need to re-order. You could also do something as simple as setting alarms on your phone to remind you.

Make sure you always have enough medication, especially for weekends or holidays. If you get regular repeat prescriptions, ask your GP or pharmacist if they offer an Electronic Prescription Service (EPS). This allows you to choose where to pick up your prescription so

you can avoid unnecessary trips to your GP. You can also have your medication delivered to you.

Taking multiple medicines at different times of the day can get confusing. Pill organisers or boxes can help ensure you take your medication at the right time. They have separate compartments for days of the week and times of day. Your local pharmacy may be able to help by providing medication in a Dosette box or blister pack. Ask your pharmacist for more information.

There are telecare devices that can remind you when to take your medication and dispense the right dose. Some can alert a help centre if you forget to take your medication. You can buy telecare privately or contact your local council and ask for a care needs assessment – see our factsheet **Technology to help you at home** for more information.

Your GP should review your medication regularly. If you've made a plan, remember to update it if anything changes.

Getting help

If you're unsure about a medication you're taking or you've got any questions, your pharmacist can advise you – you don't need an appointment – or

Speak to your GP. They can also help if you have any difficulties taking your medication – for example, if you find it hard to swallow. Don't crush pills, open capsules, change or stop taking your medication without getting advice.

If you're taking more than one medicine and you have a long-term condition, you should be able to get a free medicines use review with your pharmacist. They'll discuss all your medication with you and, if appropriate, send feedback to your GP, who can take any necessary action.

You go into a little cubicle and they ask how you're coping with the medicines. Sometimes you realise that maybe you're not taking them quite correctly – like taking it with water, not a hot drink, and all these little things that you may have known but forgotten. If you have the review, they refresh things for you. It's good to have.

Don't use any medication after the expiry date and never take medication that has been prescribed for someone else. Take any unused medication to a pharmacist for safe disposal.

Checklist of questions to ask your GP or pharmacist:

- What is this medication for?
- How long do I need to take it?
- How should I store it?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- Is it okay to take other things with it – for example, painkillers, indigestion tablets, vitamin supplements?
- Who should I speak to if there's a problem?
- How often should my medication be reviewed?
- Who do I speak to if I want to stop taking a medicine?

Important numbers

Keep a list of important numbers by the phone or programme them into your mobile so you know who to contact in an emergency.

Emergency Contacts

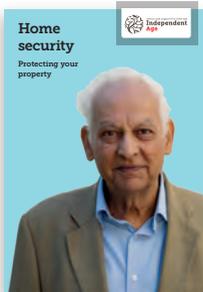
National Gas Emergency Helpline	0800 111 999
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If there's a power cut	105
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Electricity supplier	
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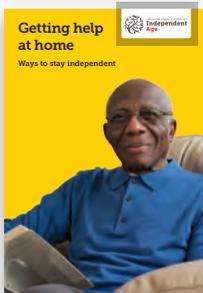
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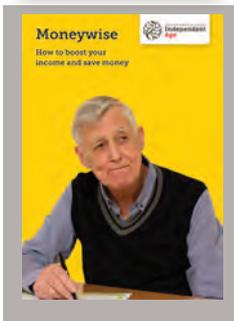
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The information in this guide applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru ([0800 022 3444](tel:08000223444), ageuk.org.uk/cymru) for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland ([0800 12 44 222](tel:08001244222), ageuk.org.uk/scotland).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI ([0808 808 7575](tel:08088087575), ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland).

We want the UK to be the best place to grow older and we have ambitious targets to increase the number of older people we help and the difference we make. We receive no state funding and rely on income from individuals, trusts and other sources to continue providing our services to hundreds of thousands of older people in need.

Visit independentage.org to make a secure online donation and find out about other ways to support us. Alternatively, you can call us on [020 7605 4223](tel:02076054223) or email supporters@independentage.org



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Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

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independentage.org

Call us for information or to arrange free, impartial advice from an adviser. Lines are open 8.30am–6.30pm Monday to Friday and 9am–1pm Saturday. Freephone **0800 319 6789** or email **advice@independentage.org**



advice and support for older age

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