



HEATING YOUR HOME

HEALTH EFFECTS OF LIVING IN A COLD HOME

- A cold home is more likely to have problems with damp and condensation. This encourages mould and dust mites to thrive which can make conditions such as asthma worse
- Living in temperatures below 12°C can lead to an increased risk of heart attack or stroke as the heart has to work harder to pump blood around the body due to a thickening of the blood
- Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature drops to 35°C (normal is 37°C). If a vulnerable person (sick or immobile) is exposed to temperatures of 9°C for two hours or more, hypothermia can occur. Hypothermia can lead to death. Symptoms include a slow, weak pulse, shallow breathing, being very cold to the touch, a change in skin colour (blue or greyish), and drowsiness. Seek medical help immediately if these symptoms occur.

Tips for avoiding Hypothermia

- Make sure your home is adequately heated especially during the winter. Living room temperature for older people should be around 21°C and bedroom temperature around 18°C. You can buy temperature thermometers cheaply in most chemists or call Bryson Energy on 0800 1422 865
- Wear several thin layers of clothing. Wools are warmer than synthetic fabrics



- Eat regular meals, including at least one hot meal per day, and take hot drinks during the day. Keep some emergency food in the house in case of bad weather or illness
- Move about at regular intervals throughout the day
- In bed, make sure there are adequate bed clothes. If you use a hot water bottle make sure it is in a good condition
- When sitting down keep a blanket over your knees to provide more heat
- Illnesses such as the flu can leave you more vulnerable. If you're over 65 it's recommended by doctors that you get the flu vaccination every year.

Energy Efficiency Advice

One way to ensure you keep warm but at the same time keep bills down is to make your home more energy efficient.

Energy efficiency tips for the home:

No cost tips

- Take the free home energy check – call the Energy Savings Trust advice Centre on 0300 123 1234
- Avoid leaving appliances such as TV's, video's, printers on standby; they are still using electricity and costing you money
- Always wash a full load of clothes
- To stop wasting money; turn your thermostat down by 1°C. Keep your thermostat at between 18-21°C
- Close all curtains and blinds at dusk and tuck longer curtains behind radiators to slow down heat loss through the windows.



- Close doors to keep heat in the occupied rooms
- Switch off lights when not in use.

Low cost tips

- Insulate your hot water tank and pipes
- Fit low energy light bulbs. They cost more but last longer and use much less electricity
- Draught-proof doors and window. It is important however, in bathrooms and kitchens that these are adequately ventilated through open windows or extractor fans, when cooking, bathing or showering
- Use the timer on your central heating to turn the heating on and off when you need it
- Fit reflective radiator panels behind radiators to reflect heat out into the room. A small shelf fitted a few inches above a radiator can help send warm heat back into the room
- Use the microwave oven for heating some food. They use 70% less power than conventional ovens.

Higher cost tips

- Insulate your cavity walls and loft; over 50% of heat is lost through the walls and roof. You may be eligible to get this free (see the section on Warm Home scheme)
- Look for the Energy Efficiency Recommended logo when buying new appliances
- Install a fully controlled central heating system. Blow heaters and electric bar heaters are much more expensive to run.

(Source: Bryson Energy and NEA NI)



Condensation and damp

If you do not heat and ventilate your home adequately you may get problems with condensation or damp.

Ways to produce less moisture include:

- Cover boiling saucepans
- Drying washing outside or in the bathroom, with the door closed and window open
- If you use a tumble dryer make sure that it is vented to the outside (unless it is a self-condensing machine).

Ventilating your home is important to allow circulation of air. Simply opening the trickle ventilator on windows can aid ventilation without causing a draught.

Insulation and draught proofing will keep your home warm and will also cut fuel bills. When the whole home is warmer, condensation is less likely. Loft and cavity wall insulation, as well as double glazing can help retain heat. In cold weather keep low background heating on all day; using thermostatic valves set low will help avoid over heating your home and high heating bills.

HELP WITH HEATING YOUR HOME

Warm Home Scheme

If you receive certain benefits you could be eligible for help through the Warm Homes Scheme.

The scheme provides insulation and heating measures to eligible households who own or rent their property and are on a specified qualifying benefit. Measures include:

- cavity wall insulation



- loft insulation
- hot water tank jackets
- energy advice
- conversion of an existing bottled gas, solid fuel central heating system or Economy 7 to oil or natural gas
- installation of a fully controlled, energy efficient oil or gas central heating system where no system currently exists
- householders with an operational oil or natural gas central heating system who meet the criteria will be eligible for insulation measures only.

For more information or to register, freephone
0800 988 0559 or visit the Warm Homes website

If you are disabled and cannot manage your existing heating system, an Occupational Therapist may be able to recommend that a switch operated heating system is provided.

To speak to an occupational therapist for more information call Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's management centre on **028 9056 5565** if you live in South and East Belfast or **0845 606 6596** if you live in North and West Belfast

Heat Smart project

Bryson Energy Agency operates a heating advice service specifically for people living in Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes. This service is free. It provides a home visit and offers help with operating heating systems



efficiently and information about how to save energy in the home.

For more information on Heat Smart, freephone
0800 1422 865

Disabled Facilities Grant

If you own your own home, or are a landlord or a private sector tenant, and have been assessed by an Occupational Therapist (OT) as needing adaptations to your home because of disability, you may be entitled to apply for the disabled facilities grant operated through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

As well as other adaptations the grant can sometimes be used to improve your heating system (e.g. changing from open fire to a switch operated system).

To speak to an occupational therapist for more information call Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's management centre on **028 9056 5565** if you live in South and East Belfast or **0845 606 6596** if you live in North and West Belfast

Winter Fuel Payments

A winter fuel payment is an annual tax-free benefit to help older people with the costs of keeping warm during the winter.



For more information about who is eligible, payment details and application forms, call the Winter Fuel Payment helpline on **08459 151 515**, text phone **0845 601 5613**, (lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm) or visit the nidirect website

Cold Weather Payments

If you're on a low income, a cold weather payment may be available to help you for each week of very cold weather in your area.

You don't need to apply. You'll get a cold weather payment automatically as long as you qualify. Tell the state pension service or your local social security office if you think you should have received a cold weather payment but you have not had one.

For more information on cold weather payments, visit the nidirect website or contact your local Social Security Office.

HEATING BILLS

Budgeting for heating bills can be a worry. There are a number of ways that you can pay for your electricity, gas or oil bills. These are outlined below.

Gas

Gas companies operating in Belfast offer a number of different methods of payment including monthly direct debit, quarterly bills, an energy saver card and a pay as you go meter.



For more information about payment methods, contact your gas provider.

Oil

Prices of home heating oil may vary depending on market conditions. By law, all tankers must have metered delivery and the driver will leave you a record of the quantity pumped into your tank. Prices are quoted per litre with many suppliers offering monthly payment plans and other services. If possible, consider ordering large amounts of oil as the price per litre is often cheaper.

You can pay for oil in different ways including cash, cheque, debit or credit cards, direct debit or pre-payment at your local PayPoint sites located in newsagents, convenience stores and petrol stations.

You can also pay for your oil using the Be Warm oil saving stamp scheme. This saving stamp scheme helps householders spread the cost of fuel by purchasing stamps from a range of retailers and using them to pay for all or part of your oil when you place an order with your supplier. Find out more about the Be Warm oil saving stamp scheme on <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/bewarm/>

Electricity

You can pay for your electricity in different ways including cash, cheque, debit or credit cards, direct debit or using a pay as you go meter.



For more information on paying your electricity bill, contact your electricity provider.

Solid fuels

Open fires are nice to look at but a lot of heat is lost up the chimney. They can be an expensive way of heating your home. Closed stoves or room heaters with glass or cast iron fronts are more efficient than open fires. It's best to shop around for the best deal when purchasing solid fuels.

If you're considering switching from a solid fuel central heating system or Economy 7 to either oil or natural gas you may be entitled to financial help through the Warm Home Scheme by visiting <http://www.warm-homes.com>

You can get more advice on switching fuels from Bryson Energy by phoning **0800 1422 865**.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

With rising fuel bills more and more people are looking to alternative sources of energy to heat their home, heat water, and produce electricity. Bryson Energy can provide advice on renewable energy technologies and the current grants available for home owners. For more information, contact Bryson Energy on **0800 1422 865**

COMPLAINTS AND ADVICE

The Consumer Council offers consumers advice and help with complaints regarding electricity, gas and coal. If you want to make a complaint or need more information, phone **0800 121 6022** or visit www.consumerline.org



NEA is the national energy action charity working in Northern Ireland to eradicate fuel poverty through campaigning, information, training, education and demonstration of good practice. NEA has been working in Northern Ireland for over 18 years and has built up expertise around all aspects of the causes, consequences, nature and extent of fuel poverty across Northern Ireland.

For advice and information Telephone: **028 9023 9909**
or visit www.nea.org.uk/nea-northern-ireland/nea-northern-ireland.htm