

Keeping warm this winter

A guide to keeping warm and staying well this winter
for those using oil fired central heating



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With many of us worrying about rising fuel costs and cold winters, OFTEC, the organisation that supports and upholds standards in the oil heating and cooking industry, has teamed up with Age UK to bring you all the information and advice you'll need to keep warm this winter – and get the most for your money on oil.

As we get older, our bodies respond differently to low temperatures and this can leave you more vulnerable in cold weather. However, with a little preparation and by following some simple suggestions, you can stay healthy, safe and as comfortable as possible this winter.

There are 1.5 million households in the UK living in rural areas off the gas grid who rely on oil to heat their homes. The good news is that the price of oil has halved in the past two years and is now significantly cheaper than mains gas, LPG and electricity.

You also have the flexibility of choosing when to top up your tank which means you can purchase your oil when the price is low. Make sure you shop around before placing an order and check the costs of at least three different suppliers to find the best price.

For more help and advice call any of the following free telephone numbers:

Age UK Advice 0800 169 65 65
(Lines open 8am to 7pm every day)

OFTEC 0800 023 62 11
(Lines open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

For a free copy of Age UK's **Winter wrapped up** guide with lots more useful information and a free room thermometer, please call 0800 169 65 65.



The importance of staying warm

Low temperatures increase the risk of flu and other respiratory problems and can raise blood pressure. Blood pressure takes longer to return to normal in older people after being out in the cold and this puts you at greater risk of heart attacks and strokes. The colder your home, the higher the risk to your health.



The recommended temperature for your main living room is around **70°F/21°C** and the rest of the house should be heated to at least **64°F/18°C** but it's vitally important if you feel cold to turn the heat up regardless of what the thermometer reads.

You should get to know how the timer and thermostat on your heating system work. If it's very cold, set the timer to switch the heating on earlier, rather than turning the thermostat up to warm your house quickly. If you have individual thermostats on your radiators, make sure they're set at the right temperature in the rooms where you spend the most of your time.

Be prepared for winter – Top 10 tips

Getting ready for the cold weather – which can start as early as October – means that you're more likely to keep warm and well. Here are some things you can do to stay safe and ward off the winter chills.

- Check your heating system – see following pages.
- Keep simple cold, flu and sore throat remedies in the house.
- Follow up your GP's invitation to have a flu jab.
- Order repeat prescriptions in plenty of time, particularly if bad weather is forecast.
- Ask your local pharmacy if they offer a prescription pick-up and delivery service.
- Dress in plenty of layers and make sure that you have some warm shoes or boots with non-slip soles.
- Eat healthily and keep as active as possible.
- Keep basic food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it's too cold to go shopping.
- Keep a mixture of salt and sand handy to put on steps or paths in icy weather.
- Consider fitting a grab rail if you have steps at your front or back door.

Ask your family, neighbours or friends if they could call or visit you more often if a period of cold weather stops you getting out and about.



Keeping your home warm

Most of us spend a lot of time indoors in winter so it's important that you are comfortable and that you keep your home warm.

10 THINGS YOU SHOULD THINK ABOUT BEFORE WINTER SETS IN:

- Have your boiler and oil tank serviced by an OFTEC registered technician to help avoid any unforeseen breakdowns at the worst possible time (see below).
- Make sure the level of oil in your tank is checked regularly (ask a friend or neighbour to do so if it isn't safe for you to check yourself).
- Order enough fuel to get you through the winter in good time so that you don't risk running out and going cold.
- Remember to bleed your radiators, or ask someone to bleed them for you, to make sure you are getting the maximum heat for your money.
- Consider improving your system controls to make sure that you aren't spending money heating rooms that you don't use.
- If your boiler is more than ten years old, it might be worth replacing it with a more modern, high efficiency boiler, which could save you money in the long run.
- If you use a real fire, ensure your chimney is swept every 12 months.
- It is also important to consider how well your home is insulated. Do everything you can to stop heat escaping from your property to save you money year after year.
- Install a carbon monoxide alarm near your boiler to alert you if your appliance malfunctions, producing this poisonous gas.
- Make sure you claim all the financial support you can (see over).

It's important to choose the right technician and avoid 'cowboys' – untrained or incompetent workmen. To find your nearest OFTEC registered technician, call our friendly advice team on **0800 023 62 11**.

How to save money on oil

A good way to save money is to buy your oil through a community oil buying group in your area. If several homes bulk order fuel this can save you a lot of money and also save you time and energy in comparing prices yourself.

Ask in your local shop or check your village magazine for details, or ask a friend or neighbour if they can look into this for you – it could help them save money as well!

Another tip is to think about buying your oil in the summer when prices are lower. If you don't use a buying group then shop around for the best price by calling at least three different providers if you can.

Choosing a distributor

For complete peace of mind we recommend choosing a fuel distributor that is a member of the FPS – the Federation of Petroleum Suppliers, an organisation that promotes the highest standards of professional service.

Oil tank security

Remember that the oil in your tank is valuable. If you live in a remote area you should consider taking appropriate security measures to prevent it from being stolen such as installing a security light near your tank, fitting a padlock or lockable cap, buying a remote electronic gauge which will set off an alarm if the oil level suddenly drops or applying warning stickers to your tank which say that it is alarmed.



Help with your heating bills

It's important to make sure you're not missing out on any benefits or discounts you're entitled to that will help you keep your home warm. You can contact your local Age UK for a benefits check and advice on any other financial support you may be eligible for.

Winter Fuel Payment

Most people over 60 are entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment to help with heating costs. This is a tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 paid to you between November and December. **If this is the first year that you are eligible, contact the Winter Fuel Payments helpline to ensure that you don't miss out on 08459 15 15 15.**

Cold Weather Payment

If you receive Pension Credit, or certain other benefits, you're automatically paid a Cold Weather Payment when the temperature is at 0°C (32°F) or below for seven days in a row.

Warm Home Discount

You may be entitled to a Warm Home Discount on your electricity bill if you receive Pension Credit or if you're on a low income. It's a one-off discount usually made between October and March. **Check with your energy supplier or ask Age UK.**

Energy Companies Obligation Scheme

This scheme could help you if you're on a low income and receive certain means-tested benefits such as Pension Credit, or live in a home that would be costly and difficult to make more energy efficient. **To find out whether you're eligible, call the Energy Saving Trust on 0300 123 1234.**

Help with insulation

The Energy Saving Trust may also be able to help you with financial support to draught-proof your doors and windows, insulate your loft, lag your hot-water tank and pipes and install cavity-wall insulation which will help to keep your home warm and your bills down. **Call the Energy Saving Trust on 0300 123 1234 or Home Heat Helpline on 0800 33 66 99 for advice.**

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FREE TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

Age UK Advice 0800 169 65 65 (8am to 7pm every day)

OFTEC 0800 023 62 11 (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

**Home Heat
Helpline** 0800 33 66 99 (9am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday)

Silver Line 0800 470 80 90 (24 hours a day)

(a new confidential
help line providing
information, friendship
and advice)

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Further information about saving money
on oil can be found at www.oilsave.org.uk



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The *energy* behind liquid fuels



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