

Identifying and preventing condensation and damp in your home

There are many causes of condensation or damp in your home. It is important to find out how and why it is happening so you can tackle the problem and stop it happening again.

This leaflet contains general information on how to identify, prevent and treat condensation and damp in your home.



What's the reason?	Could be rising damp	Could be damp coming from above	Could be condensation
Where is the problem?			
On the windows – they get fogged up, water collects on horizontal window frames or black mould appears.			√
In cupboards or behind large items of furniture placed against an outside or stair wall. Maybe seen as black or grey powdery mould.			√
Around the skirting on ground floors – paper peeling away, paint bubbling, plaster crumbling or white tide marks on the walls.	√		
On ceilings.		√	
In the middle of walls.		√	√
At the top of walls under the roof.		√	√
Chimney breasts		√	√

Condensation

If you find water on the inside of your windows or on other cold surfaces, it is likely to be caused by condensation. You may find black mould on the walls particularly in cold corners or cupboards or blue/green mould on leather or wood.

Condensation is caused when warm moist air meets cold surfaces. It happens mainly in the winter when the walls in your house are cold and the moist air caused by household activities such as drying clothes, cooking, bathing and even breathing hits the wall and condenses into water.

The water that collects on the wall or surface can allow mould to grow and is more evident where there is little air movement as the wall/surface does not get the chance to dry out.

Common areas for condensation to occur are windows, walls, just above the skirting boards and the corners of rooms, particularly at floor and ceiling height.

How do I reduce formation of condensation?

1. Produce less moisture

Don't dry clothes on radiators. If you do, open windows and ensure lots of ventilation.

Dry clothes outside whenever possible.

Cover pans when cooking, use an extractor fan (if you have one) and keep windows open.

Ensure lots of ventilation when using a tumble dryer. If it has a vent hose, ensure it leads to the outside.

Avoid using paraffin or flueless bottled gas heaters

2. Ventilate to remove moisture

Increase the ventilation in your home by opening windows regularly and by using window or wall vents.

Make sure an extractor fan is kept on when showering or bathing. Open a window afterwards to allow warm air to escape.

Make sure air bricks (large ventilation bricks with holes in them) are not blocked up or covered.

Avoid keeping furniture close up against the wall.

3. Insulate and draught-proof

Draught-proof windows and external doors.

Consider secondary glazing, cavity wall insulation and/or insulating the loft.

(SCARF can offer guidance and you may be eligible for a grant – see back for contact details.)

4. Heat your home a little more

To reduce the risk of condensation it is better to keep the heating on 'low' for longer periods than 'high' for short periods to prevent walls becoming too cold.

(Heating your home may be expensive – SCARF can offer guidance on the best way to heat your home and any financial assistance that might be available – see back for contact details.)

How do I get rid of the results of condensation?

Wipe down windows and sills every morning. Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.

Install condensation channels and sponge strips (available from DIY shops) to collect water and stop it damaging window frames.

If condensation has led to mould you will need to scrub the walls to remove it, ideally with fungicidal wash, and repaint the surface with a mould resistant paint. If papering the walls, use fungicidal wallpaper paste.

Remember to take the measures on the previous page to stop the condensation from coming back.

Damp

Damp is caused when water enters the fabric of a property or when there has been long-term condensation. You may need to contact a specialist to identify the cause of the damp and/or to fix the problem.

Damp on ceilings/tops of walls

You should check:

Gutters:

Blocked gutters can lead to water spilling over, leaking into your home and causing damp. You should check and clean your gutters regularly. Leaves often cause blockages. You can buy a leaf guard at a DIY store to prevent this.

Flashing:

'Flashing' is the name for the protective layer (often lead or zinc) that prevents water access at angles, seams or joints on the roof. Check flashing regularly to ensure it is not damaged.

Slates:

Roof slates can break or come loose. After a storm or bad weather check the area around your house for moved or fallen slates.

Down Pipes and Over Flows:

If these are leaking they will need to be repaired to prevent any water soaking through the building.

Poor Ventilation in the loft:

Ensure there is sufficient ventilation in the loft area via either ventilation bricks or vents in the soffits (the horizontal piece between the outside wall of your house and the bottom of the roofline). Ridge vents or roof tile vents can be used.

Damp coming up from the floor/bottom of walls

You should check:

Is there a leak from your plumbing or central heating system?

Contact a heating contractor or qualified plumber in the event of any leaks. It is recommended that you get your heating serviced every year by a qualified heating engineer. A pipe detector, available at DIY stores, can be used to help identify where your pipework is behind the walls which may help identify if a leak is the cause of the problem.

Are your gutters, downpipes or overflows damaged or blocked?

These may need cleared out, repaired or replaced.

Are your drains blocked?

Check your sinks, toilets etc. are draining properly and there is not a collection of water at any external drains.

Is the ground level outside your house higher than the bottom of your house and Damp Proof Course/Membrane (a barrier that prevents moisture rising through the structure of your house)?

You need to try and lower the level of the ground to at least 15cm below the DPC.

If your DPC/M is damaged or broken, contact a suitable contractor to discuss your options to prevent damp.

Damp in the middle of walls

This is normally caused by:

- Hidden pipework developing a leak.
- Something blocking the wall cavity allowing damp to cross from the outer wall to the inner.
- Water entering an unused chimney flue.

Once you have removed the cause of damp it may take some time for the dampness to dry out. Providing heating and ventilation to affected rooms will help.

If damp is not treated straight away it can lead to more serious problems such as wet or dry rot.

Wet rot

Wet rot occurs when wood gets wet and dries out repeatedly causing the wood to soften and rot.

It is important that you find out where the water is coming from and stop it. Affected wood will need to be replaced and you should treat remaining wood with a preservative.

Dry rot

Dry rot is wood decay caused by a fungus which lives off the wood. It can affect large areas, often extending beyond the original water entry point. It normally occurs when damp wood has no air circulation around it. Dry rot is destructive and expensive to treat and can stay dormant for long periods. Affected timber and plaster work must be stripped out and replaced.

If the structural timber in your house (roof joists or floors) is affected by either type of rot, you should seek expert advice from a qualified timber specialist as soon as possible.

Contacts

For further information please contact the Private Sector Housing Team at:

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Which? Guide ‘How to stop condensation’

www.which.co.uk/reviews/damp/article/dealing-with-damp/how-to-stop-condensation

Which? Guide ‘What kind of damp is affecting my home?’

www.which.co.uk/reviews/damp/article/dealing-with-damp/what-kind-of-damp-is-affecting-my-home



