



Amigos de la Gente de Edad

Keeping warm and keeping well

Keeping warm is a vital part of keeping yourself well in winter and even in Spain there are parts which are as cold in winter, particularly at night, as northern Europe.

This is true for those who may be particularly vulnerable, such as older people, people with chronic illness, or young children.

Key points on keeping warm

- Try to keep a constant temperature of 21° C (70°F) in all rooms including the bedroom, bathroom and passages. If this is difficult, keep one room warm but preheat the bed and bedroom before retiring for the night.
- Make sure your home is well insulated.
- Make sure you always know what the temperature is in your home by buying room thermometers.
- Use draught excluders and keep curtains closed but make sure you do not block up air vents as fuel-burning appliances need fresh air to burn properly. Users of butano, in particular, must ensure that floor-level vents are kept open in case of a gas leak.
- Make sure you have some hot food and drink every day.
- Take a little exercise every day.
- Wrap up warmly before going out - no matter how short the trip.
- Always wear gloves and a hat, cap or headscarf out of doors.
- Keep warm in bed at night, but be particularly careful with electric blankets as annual safety checks may be difficult in Spain.

Keeping yourself warm

Everyone is at risk in very cold weather. But if you are seriously underweight, or have a disability, or if you have chronic bronchitis, emphysema, asthma, or a previous history of heart disease or stroke, it is advisable to take special care to keep warm.

'Flu is common in the winter months. You can be vaccinated against it - this is recommended if you have chronic bronchitis, asthma, heart disease, kidney disease, or diabetes (or another endocrine disorder). So ask your doctor about vaccination - it might save you from being ill.

Food is fuel

The right food and drink are vitally important in keeping you warm and healthy in the winter months. During cold weather, hot meals and plenty of hot drinks are beneficial.

Have at least one proper meal a day. If possible this should be hot food. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Remember that bread, milk, meat, fish, eggs, potatoes, peas and beans (including baked beans) are a good source of protein, energy and vitamins.

A warm drink before going to bed may help to keep you warm. It might be a good idea to keep a vacuum flask filled with a hot drink by your bedside in case you wake up in the night feeling cold.

If you are on a special diet, you should talk to your doctor before changing your daily food and drink in any way.

Keeping active

As we get older our bodies are not as good at keeping warm as they used to be. Circulation problems, arthritis, other medical conditions, or a poor appetite can make things worse.

When you move around or take any form of exercise, extra heat is produced inside your body, so any kind of activity, no matter how leisurely, will help to keep you warm. This is why it is so very important to keep 'on the move'.

Do not remain sitting down for long periods without getting up and moving about. Try to space out any jobs you have to do so that you can alternate resting times with activity.

In cold weather it may be better to take some form of indoor exercise rather than to go outdoors. Even walking up and down stairs can help to keep you warm. It is helpful, particularly if you cannot go out, to try to exercise your arms and legs.

Moving your hands and feet stimulates circulation.

Wrapping up warmly when you go out

Never underestimate just how cold it can be outside. If you have to go out in cold weather, cover your head and wear suitable clothing.

Always wear a cap, hat or head-scarf, as a very large proportion of your body heat is lost through the top of your head. If it is windy, as well as cold, remember to wear a scarf inside your coat collar.

It is important to have warm shoes or boots when you go outside. A warm insole can be added to insulate your feet against cold ground underfoot, and if your boots are roomy enough, you can put on an extra pair of socks.

Remember, if your head, ears, hands and feet are well covered, you will feel much warmer all over.

Wrapping up warmly when you're indoors

At home several layers of clothing (rather than just one very thick layer) will keep you warm during the day by trapping warm air between them.

Wearing a long-sleeved vest or T-shirt under your normal clothes will make you feel much warmer than if you only add heavy layers on top.

Even quite a thin silky scarf or neckerchief wrapped around your neck inside your collar will be very effective.

Wearing thermal underwear, or warm nightwear, with bed socks, and a night cap or headscarf round your head will also keep you warm at night.

Generally clothes made from natural fibres such as wool, cotton, or silk will keep you warmer than clothes made from synthetic fibres. However, there are now synthetic fibres on the market which are specifically designed to be light yet very warm.

Staying warm indoors

You should aim to keep your abode warm at all times. An 'all house' temperature of 21°C (70°F) is recommended for the maintenance of health and comfort of older people. Temperatures, even in Mediterranean areas, can fall particularly low during the night, so it is best to keep your bedroom window closed in cold weather with some form of heating in the room where you sleep. Make sure you follow the manufacturer's safety instructions. A wall thermometer may help you check that your room is warm enough.

Even something as simple and inexpensive as a hot water bottle can make you feel more comfortable, at any time of the day or night. Rubber hot water bottles should be filled with water that is not too hot, and should be covered to avoid any risk of scalds through leakage.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

NEVER use a hot water bottle and an electric blanket together. This could be extremely dangerous and could give you an electric shock.

Keeping your home warm:

Draught proofing doors and windows/double glazing

All the heat in your home will eventually escape to the outside through windows, doors, walls, ceilings, floors and so on. However, just how long it takes for the heat to flow out will depend on how well insulated and draughtproofed your home is. This is an inexpensive home improvement and will help you to save money on your fuel bill.

Sitting in a draughty room will lower your body temperature and make you feel cold and uncomfortable. Yet the problem of draughts can be simply and effectively solved by filling in any gaps around windows and doors with draughtproofing materials.

Seal gaps in window frames, between window frames and walls and between the frame and the opening parts of each window. You can leave the top edge of some windows free of draughtproofing to allow a little ventilation.

Remember, floor-level draughtproofing materials should be fitted securely and not be loose-lying as they can be a hazard, causing falls. If possible, use the best quality materials.

Double glazing does not have to be very expensive. Fitting plastic sheeting to your window frames by using double-sided tape, or magnetic strip, is cheap and effective. But make sure the sheeting is easily detachable so that it does not stop you getting out through the window in case of fire.

Hang heavy curtains or curtains with thermal linings. When you draw the curtains in the evening, remember not to cover radiators which are under the windows. Put metal or plastic draught-proofing strips around the sides of doors. Fit draught excluders to the bottom of doors. Hang a heavy curtain over the front door.

Insulating the hot water cylinder and pipes

Insulating the hot water cylinder or lagging pipes will mean your water will stay hot for a longer time, and should reduce the cost of water heating.

Using heating wisely:

If you have central heating -

Ensure that you are familiar with any heating controls the system may have, such as a time clock or programmer. If you have any difficulties, ask someone you know and trust to explain them to you, or ask the company which installed the system.

Set the heating thermostat at a temperature which you find comfortable. As a general rule, older people should set the heating thermostat at between 21°C 23°C (70°F - 75°F) to prevent cold-related illness. Below 16°C (61°F) there is a greater risk of respiratory illness, and below 12°C (54°F) there is an increased risk of having a stroke or heart attack. The risk of developing hypothermia increases if your house temperature drops below 9°C (48°F) for more than a few hours. If you find the room getting too hot, do not open the windows; instead turn the thermostat setting down a degree or two.

You should set the timer so that the system switches on at 21°C - 23°C (70°F - 75°F), the recommended temperature, a few hours before rising in the morning and turns off when you normally go to bed.

If you want to warm rooms in very cold temperatures, set the heating to come on earlier rather than turning it up higher.

If you have a boiler, have it serviced once a year to ensure it is running at peak efficiency and is safe.

Specially reflective backing placed behind radiators reflects heat. This is padded for extra effect. Alternatively, put kitchen foil, shiny side facing you, behind any radiators fitted on outside walls.

Fix small shelves about 5 cms. (2") above the radiators. This will direct warm air towards the centre of the room.

If your home is heated by individual fires or heaters -

Try to choose heaters which give out enough heat to suit the size of the room. If you are a tenant, check with your landlord that there are no restrictions on the types of heater permitted in your home. There may be special safety regulations, especially in apartment blocks.

If you are buying an electric heater ensure it has a built-in thermostat. This type of heater will shut itself off when the room is warm enough, and then switch on again when the temperature has cooled.

Remember that standard electric fires - such as electric bar fires and fan heaters - are particularly costly to run.

If you have an open fire you should regulate the burning rate by careful use of the air control.

SAFETY

- **Never sit too close to fires.** Put guards on all open fires.
- **Do not dry wet clothes on or close to heaters.** Apart from the fire risk involved, this could allow the spread of moist air to the rest of your home, and might lead to condensation problems.
- **Always to leave sufficient ventilation to keep the air fresh** and for butano and wood fires to burn safely.
- **NEVER BLOCK VENTILATION BRICKS OR GRILLS.**
- **Always ensure that the rubber tubing on a butano appliance is changed** regularly and is **NEVER** allowed to pass its warranty date.

What to do in an emergency

As people get older, their bodies become less able to maintain a constant temperature, and at the same time grow less sensitive to changes in external temperature. **As a result, older people can often be cold without actually feeling that they are cold.**

If body temperature is allowed to fall below 35°C (95°F) hypothermia may set in. Unless treated at once, this condition can be fatal. Young babies, whose sensitivity to temperature change has not developed, are also particularly at risk.

If you find an older person or young child living in a cold room where the temperature is below 16°C (61°F), then you should quickly take steps to improve the situation. Turn up the heating gradually, ensure that they are wrapped up well in light blankets or warmer clothing, give them a warm drink, and then seek help.

Watch out for the danger signs!!

- Drowsiness.
- Very cold skin on parts of the body normally covered, for example stomach or armpits.
- Slurred speech.
- Absence of complaint about feeling cold, even in a bitterly cold room.

Summary

- Move the person into warmer surroundings.
- Wrap the person in a light layer of blankets or a duvet to avoid further loss of body heat.
- Give the person warm nourishing drinks.
- Call a doctor or nurse.
- Do not subject the person to any sudden extreme change of temperature - so do NOT put them near a fire or give them a hot water bottle or heavy layers of clothes or blankets.
- Do NOT give them alcohol, as it will stimulate further heat loss through the skin.

Looking out for trouble

If someone has had an accident in his/her home, fallen and injured him/herself or has been taken ill, he/she may not be able to attract the attention of neighbours, passers-by or people who call at the door. Always be on the look-out for signs that something might be wrong, especially when the weather is cold.

There are many signs to look for:

- Curtains drawn during the day.
- Lights burning during the day.
- Home in darkness when there should be someone at home.
- Dog barking all day and the cat scratching to be let in.

With acknowledgement to the sponsors of the 'Keep Warm, Keep Well' campaign.

Don't wait for older people to say they're cold.

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