

Damp and condensation

Tackling the problem

No one wants to live in a damp home. Damp can cause mould on walls and furniture and cause wooden window frames to rot. It's also unhealthy.

Some damp is caused by **condensation**. This can lead to a growth in mould that appears as a cloud of little black dots. For other kinds of damp, see box below.

Condensation occurs when moist air comes into contact with a colder surface like a wall, window, mirror etc. The air can't hold the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. It also occurs in places the air is still, like the corners of rooms or behind wardrobes and other furniture.

How to reduce condensation at home

1] Produce less moisture

Simple things make a huge difference, like covering pans when cooking (below), drying clothes outdoors, venting your tumble dryer to the outside and not using paraffin heaters or flue-less bottled gas heaters.



Condensation is not the only cause of damp

'**Penetrating damp**' is caused by moisture entering the house through leaking pipes, a damaged roof, blocked gutters, gaps around window frames and cracked or defective rendering and brickwork. All these problems can be remedied.

'**Rising damp**' is due to a defective (or non-existent) damp course. This will leave a 'tide mark' about 1m above the floor. Fixing rising damp is a job for a qualified builder.

Newly built homes can sometimes feel damp because the water used during construction (in cement, plaster etc) is still drying out.



Condensation mould is unsightly and can cause health problems

2] Let the damp air out and the fresh air in

Consider installing extractor fans in your kitchen and bathroom if they don't have one already, and shut the doors between these rooms and the rest of the house when they get steamy. Open your windows when you can, and allow the air to circulate behind furniture and through cupboards and wardrobes.

3] Insulate and draught-proof your home

Warm homes suffer less from condensation, so you should make sure your house is well insulated. This means insulating your loft to the recommended depth of 270mm (about 11 inches), and your cavity walls (if your house has them). Your windows and external doors should be draught-proofed, and you should consider secondary glazing if your windows are draughty.



For more on insulation see our factsheets on solid wall insulation, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation, and also on DIY draught-proofing. Available to download at www.cse.org.uk/advice-leaflets



"If your home is damp because of a condensation problem it may take weeks to dry out. Hiring a dehumidifier will help"



A typical place for condensation mould, on an outside wall and behind furniture

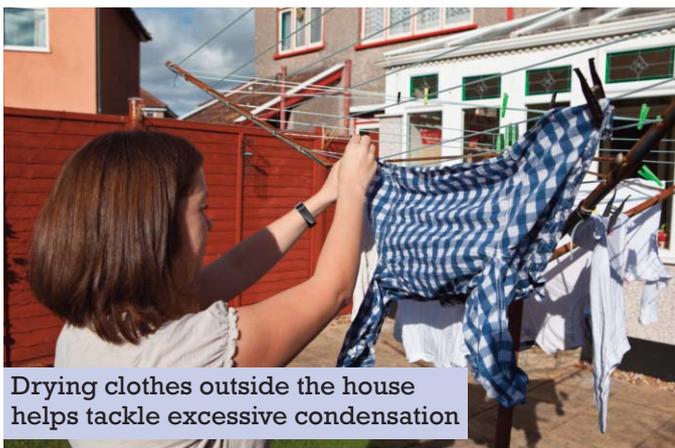
4] Heat your home a little more

Keep a low background heat in unused rooms. Use a thermostat on the heater or radiator, and remember to air the rooms from time to time.

Other actions you can take include fitting condensation channels and sponge strips (available from DIY shops) to windows. These catch dripping condensation and prevent the build-up of water. If you wipe down windows and sills every morning, this will help, but be sure to wring out the cloth rather than dry it on a radiator. A dehumidifier will help a lot, but they start from around £100 and cost about the same to run as a fridge.

And finally, to get rid of mould on walls and other surfaces, wipe down the affected areas with a fungicidal wash. Follow the manufacturer's guidance carefully.

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Drying clothes outside the house helps tackle excessive condensation

Tips for lower energy bills

Happy paying more for your electricity and gas than you need to? Course not. So here's how you can cut your bills:

Give your clothes a day in the sun and give your tumble drier a break. Clothes dried in the fresh air feel great, and there are drying days in winter, too.



Catch 'em young. Encourage your children to switch off electric toys and lights that they're not using. They'll soon get the hang of saving energy.



Be a friend to your freezer. Defrost it regularly to help it run more efficiently.

Buying a new washing machine, TV or dishwasher? Look out for the Energy Saving Trust logo.



Don't over-fill the kettle (but do make sure you cover the metal element at the base).



Dodge the draught! Fit draught-excluders to your front door, letter box and key hole, and draw your curtains at dusk to keep the heat in.

Turn your heating down by 1 degree. You'll hardly notice the change in temperature, but it'll make a big difference to your heating bill.

Sleep tight. Make sure all the lights are turned off when you go to bed. If you want to light a child's room or a landing, use a low-wattage night light.



The Centre for Sustainable Energy's Home Energy Team offers free advice on domestic energy use to householders in Bristol and Somerset (including the unitary authorities of North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset).

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