

Winter wrapped up

.....
A guide to keeping warm
and well this winter
.....



Free
thermometer
inside

Information and advice you need to help you love later life.

We're Age UK and our goal is to enable older people to love later life.

We are passionate about affirming that your later years can be fulfilling years. Whether you're enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we're here to help you make the best of your life.

Our network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International and more than 150 local partners.

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What this guide is about

Winter isn't everyone's favourite season and there's no doubt that cold weather can be a worry for those of us in later life. As we get older, our bodies respond differently to the cold and this can leave us more vulnerable. Keeping warm both inside and outside your home can help reduce your risk of serious health problems that are more common in the colder months, such as chest infections, heart attacks and strokes.

This guide explains what you can do to get yourself and your home ready for winter, as well as where to go for more information and support.

This guide is applicable across England and Scotland. In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI and in Wales, contact Age Cymru, for their versions of this guide (see page 23).

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

Preparing for winter

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 make sure that you stay safe and ward off the winter chills.

Get your home winter ready

- Get your heating system serviced every year to make sure it’s running safely and efficiently. Gas heating must be serviced by a qualified Gas safe-registered engineer (see page 25). If you’re a tenant, your landlord should check your gas heating system and appliances at least once a year.
- See our free guide *Save energy, pay less* for tips on insulating and draught proofing your home. You could also check with your energy supplier to see whether they have further advice to help you prepare for winter.
- Make sure you claim all the financial support you can to help with heating bills. Your local Age UK can advise you.



Prepare for freezing temperatures

- If water pipes freeze they can burst, so you need to be able to turn off the water at the main stopcock. Make sure you know where your main stopcock is and check that it’s easy to turn. If it’s jammed, you may need to replace it.
- Keep extra food items in the cupboard or freezer in case it’s too cold to go shopping. You could do your food shopping online and get it delivered to your door.
- Keep a mixture of salt and sand handy to put on steps or paths in icy weather. Some councils provide free bags of the mix or try a local DIY store.
- If you’re worried about walking your dog in icy weather, contact The Cinnamon Trust (see page 24). They may be able to match you with a dog-walking volunteer in your area.

Plan ahead for your health

- Make sure you have a yearly flu jab. It's free if you're aged 65 and over, or if you're a carer or have certain long-term conditions.
- Order repeat prescriptions in plenty of time, particularly if bad weather is forecast. Ask your local pharmacy if it offers a prescription pick-up and delivery service.
- Keep simple cold, flu and sore throat remedies in the house. Your pharmacist can make suggestions and advise you on how to manage minor illnesses.

Stay safe

- Make sure your smoke alarm is working. You can ask your local fire service for a free home fire safety check. You may be eligible to get free smoke alarms fitted.
- Install an audible carbon monoxide alarm in each room that has a gas or solid-fuel burning appliance. If you're a private tenant, your landlord must install carbon monoxide alarms and smoke alarms for you.
- Consider fitting a grab rail if you have steps at your front or back door. Ask your local Age UK for more information.
-  In Scotland, contact Care and Repair Scotland for details of your local service (see page 24).
- Ask your family or friends if they could call or visit you more often if there's an extended period of cold weather.
- Keep a torch handy in case you lose power and keep your radio, mobile phone, laptop or tablet fully charged.
-  If your area is liable to floods, sign up for free flood warnings from Floodline (see page 25). In Scotland, contact the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (see page 25).
- Use page 22 to write down emergency numbers, such as utility companies, and keep it by your phone.

Staying safe and healthy

If you're exposed to a cold environment for a long time, or to extreme cold for only a short time, your blood pressure rises which means you could be at risk of a heart attack or stroke.

To help you stay well, it's important to keep warm, follow as healthy a lifestyle as you can, and have a flu jab. To find out more about following a healthy lifestyle see our free guides *Healthy living* and *Healthy eating*.

Keep moving

Staying active is not only essential for your general wellbeing and fitness – it also generates heat and helps to keep you warm. When you're indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour. Get up and walk around and spread out any chores throughout the day. If walking is difficult you can do chair-based exercises while sitting or holding on to the back of a chair. Even moving your arms and legs and wiggling your toes can help you keep warm. You can watch videos online that demonstrate chair-based exercises by visiting the NHS Choices website (see page 26).

Eat well

Hot meals and drinks help to keep you warm, so eat at least one hot meal each day and have hot drinks during the day. Having a hot drink before going to bed and keeping one in a flask by your bedside are good ideas. Include a good range of foods in your diet and aim to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day, so that you're getting plenty of nutrients and vitamins. Frozen vegetables are as good as fresh. It's important to eat enough, especially in winter. Not eating enough and becoming underweight is bad for your health as it makes it more difficult to keep warm and fight infections. If you're worried about a poor appetite or losing weight, speak to your GP.

Keep warm

Even when temperatures don't seem extreme, cold weather can make you more vulnerable to some illnesses, so it's vital that you stay warm during the cold winter months. Read the sections 'Keeping yourself warm' and 'Keeping your home warm' to find out more (see pages 12-15).

Have a seasonal flu jab

If you're aged 65 and over, the Government recommends that you have a flu jab. Flu viruses are always changing, so you need a jab every year, using the latest vaccine. Flu isn't only unpleasant, it can also develop into pneumonia, which can be serious.

The flu jab is free to people aged 65 and over and also to carers and people under 65 who have conditions that make them susceptible to complications if they have flu. Ask your GP or pharmacist if you think you're eligible.

It takes up to 10 days for the vaccine to take effect, so it's best to have it as early as possible – most surgeries and pharmacists start to offer it in September or October. Your vaccinated arm may be sore, or you may have a slight temperature or aching muscles for a few days, but other side effects are rare.

Check you've had a 'pneumo' jab

The 'pneumo' (or pneumococcal) jab is a one-off vaccination that helps protect you against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia (a type of blood poisoning). Ask your GP about it if you're aged 65 and over, and haven't had one.

Have good hand hygiene

Good hand hygiene is a simple way to prevent the spread of colds and flu. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, and clean surfaces such as your telephone, door handles and keyboard to get rid of germs. Use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.

Consider taking a vitamin D supplement

Our bodies create vitamin D from sunlight when we're outdoors. We need it for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. During the winter months in the UK the sun isn't strong enough for our bodies to make vitamin D, and it's difficult to get the amount we need from food alone. You might want to speak to your GP to discuss taking a supplement to boost your levels in winter.

Give up smoking

Quitting smoking has a positive impact on your overall health. Smoking lowers your immune system and can cause serious health conditions. After you stop smoking, you'll quickly notice that your breathing is easier and that doing any exercise is more comfortable. Ask at your GP practice about NHS services to help you give up. If you live in England, call the free NHS Smokefree Helpline (see page 26). If you live in Scotland, call Smokeline (see page 26).



Protect yourself against chilblains

Chilblains are itchy, red swellings that occur when your skin gets cold and you try to warm up too quickly, often by sitting close to an open fire, a radiator or heater. Dab the swellings with calamine or witch hazel to reduce itching, but don't scratch them as this could cause an infection. Speak to your pharmacist for advice on treating chilblains and see your GP if you get chilblains regularly or have diabetes.

To help prevent chilblains, keep your whole body warm at all times – have a look at the tips on pages 12-13. Wear trousers, socks or thick tights and a scarf, hat and gloves whenever you go out in the cold.

Get a personal alarm

If you fall or you're unwell, a personal alarm connects you to a 24-hour call centre. You press a button on a pendant you wear around your neck or as a wrist band and talk to someone who will contact a chosen person to help you – usually a neighbour, friend or relative – or the emergency services.

Many councils run personal alarm schemes; contact your local council to find out more or search www.gov.uk/apply-for-community-alarm.

Take care when driving

If you absolutely have to drive in bad weather, make sure you allow extra time for your journey. Tell someone your destination and when you expect to arrive there. Always charge your mobile phone fully before you set off and make sure you take warm clothes, boots, food, water, a torch and a spade in case you need them.

Keep your spirits up

It's not unusual to feel down in winter – particularly when the days are short and it can get dark by 3.30pm. Try to keep to your usual routine and if you can't visit friends or family, make sure you phone or Skype them regularly for a chat. If you're feeling lonely contact your local Age UK to see if they offer friendship services. If there are no local services and you're interested in a weekly telephone friendship call, contact the national Call in Time Service at Age UK on 0800 434 6105 to find out more. In Scotland, contact Age Scotland for information about friendship services.



It helps to do something you enjoy every day. If you can and it's not too cold, go for a short walk in the middle of the day, or at least go outside while there is daylight. There may be local classes or social groups you can attend. Check your local community centre or library noticeboard or contact your local Age UK to find out what opportunities there are in your area.

If you feel down for several weeks and it's stopping you going out or making you feel lethargic and lacking in energy, it's very important to share these feelings with someone, perhaps a friend or your GP. For more information see our free guide *Your mind matters*.

To help you **stay well**,
it's important to **keep warm**,
follow as healthy a lifestyle as you
can, and **have a flu jab**.

Myth-busting

Here are some myths you might hear about winter and the cold.

Do any of these apply to you?



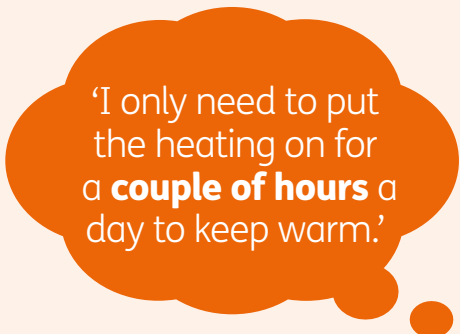
‘Wearing a hat is **enough** to keep me warm on a winter’s day.’

As well as a hat, wrapping a scarf around your neck and mouth can **help to protect** your health. Breathing in cold air raises the risk of chest infections and increases blood pressure.




‘A **warm bedroom** is bad for my health.’

18°C/64°F is the ideal temperature for your bedroom to make sure that you are warm and well in winter.



'I only need to put the heating on for a **couple of hours** a day to keep warm.'

It's best to keep your house at a **stable temperature** as sudden changes can be dangerous. Try to keep your main living room at 21°C/70°F and close any doors to rooms you're not using.



'I'll only get the **benefits of insulation** in winter.'

Insulation is a bit like a Thermos – it keeps **warm things warm** and **cool things cool**. So your home will stay warm in winter and cool in summer. You'll feel the benefits all year round.



'I don't **qualify** for any help with my heating costs.'

Contact your local Age UK for a **benefits check**, to find out what financial support is available and to see if you're eligible for any help.



'I can't see why keeping my bedroom **window open** is bad for my health.'

If you leave your bedroom window open you're likely to breathe in cold air, which **lowers body temperature** and raises the risk of chest infections, heart attacks and strokes.

Keeping yourself warm

Even if it isn't a severe winter, cold weather makes us more vulnerable to certain illnesses. Follow these tips to stay healthy, and keep warm indoors and out.

Keeping warm indoors

- If you're sitting down, a shawl or blanket will provide a lot of warmth. Try to keep your feet propped up, as the air is cooler at ground level.
- Wear warm clothes in bed and, when it's very cold, wear thermal underwear, bed socks and even a hat – you lose a lot of heat through your head.
- Use a hot-water bottle, wheat bag or an electric blanket to warm the bed, but never use a hot-water bottle and an electric blanket together.
- Check whether your electric blanket can be kept on all night or whether it's only designed to warm the bed before you get in. If you have any continence difficulties, talk to your doctor before using one.
- Get your electric blanket checked every three years by an expert. Local trading standards departments often offer free testing (see page 26), or you can ask at the shop where you bought the blanket, though they may charge you for this.

Keeping warm outdoors

- Make sure you keep your hands and face warm. As well as wearing gloves and a hat, always wrap a scarf around your face when you go out in cold weather, even for short intervals. This helps to warm up the air you breathe in. If your hands and face get cold this can cause a rise in blood pressure, which puts you at risk of a heart attack.

- Several thin layers of clothing will keep you warmer than one thick layer, as the layers trap warm air between them. Start with thermal underwear, warm tights or wool socks.
- Keep your feet warm. As with your hands and face, cold feet can trigger a potentially dangerous rise in blood pressure. Choose boots with non-slip soles and a warm lining, or wear thermal socks. These boots not only keep your feet warm, they also keep you safe if the ground is slippery.
- Check local news and weather reports for advice when bad weather is forecast.



Even if it isn't a **severe winter**, cold weather makes us **more vulnerable** to certain illnesses.

Keeping your home warm

Most of us spend a lot of time indoors in winter, so it's important you are comfortable and safe there. It's essential to keep your home warm.

Low temperatures increase the risk of flu and other breathing problems and can raise blood pressure. When you're older, your blood pressure takes longer to return to normal once you're cold, increasing the risk of heart attacks and strokes. The colder your home, the higher the risk to your health.

Keeping your home at a safe temperature

- Keep your main living room around 21°C/70°F, and the rest of your home heated to at least 18°C/64°F. You can use the thermometer included in this guide to check your room temperature. If you still feel cold, turn the heat up regardless of what the thermometer reads.
- Keep your bedroom window closed at night when the weather is cold. The coldest time of day is just before dawn.
- Close the curtains at dusk to keep the heat in and fit thermal linings to them if you can.

Using your heating controls

- 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, set them at higher temperatures in the rooms where you spend more time. For more information about how to understand your heating controls, see our free guide *Save energy, pay less*.

Heating your home safely

- Put guards on open fires, and don't hang washing too close to the fire.
- Don't block up air vents as fires and heaters need good ventilation, which also helps to prevent condensation.
- Test your carbon monoxide alarms. You can't see, taste or smell carbon monoxide, but low exposure can cause long-term health problems, while high exposure can cause poisoning. You should have an alarm in each room that has a gas or solid-fuel burning appliance, as these can give off carbon monoxide if they're not working properly or if air vents become blocked. If you're a private tenant, your landlord must install carbon monoxide alarms for you.

Getting help with heating costs

- Contact your local Age UK for a benefits check and advice on any other financial support you may be eligible for (in Scotland, contact Age Scotland). If you're having difficulty paying your heating bills, contact Charis Grants, an organisation that can direct you to grants to help with utility debts (see page 24).



If you still feel cold,
turn the heat up
regardless of what the
thermometer reads.

Kathy was worried about keeping her home warm in winter.

Kathy, 77, lives by herself in a two bedroom flat.

'I've never liked the cold and my flat can get a bit chilly. My heating bills get higher every year and I need to watch the pennies so I can keep my home warm.

'I popped into my local Age UK and got some information, which was very helpful. I live by myself and I don't use my second bedroom very often so I keep the radiator on low in there and the door shut. That saves a bit of money on the bills. I've also put a draught excluder against my front door. I didn't expect it to make much difference but it's made my hallway much less draughty.

'One of my neighbours showed me how to switch my energy supplier online. It wasn't as hard as I thought it might be and the money I'm saving is very welcome.

'I mentioned to my local Age UK that I was worried about paying the bills so they carried out a benefits check for me. I didn't think I'd be entitled to anything but they told me I could get Pension Credit, which has given me a bit more money.

'I used to dread the winter but now my flat feels warmer and I'm less worried about the heating bills too. It's a real weight off my mind.'



'I used to **dread the winter** but now my flat feels warmer. It's a real **weight off my mind.**'

Extra help with heating costs

Many of us worry about rising fuel costs. It's important to make sure you're not missing out on any benefits or discounts you're entitled to that will help you to keep your home warm.

Winter Fuel Payment

Most people born before 5 November 1953 are entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment in 2018–19 to help with heating costs. This is a tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 paid to you between November and December. If you've received the payment before you should get it automatically this year, but if this is the first year that you're eligible, contact the Winter Fuel Payment helpline (see page 26) to make sure that you don't miss out.

Cold Weather Payment

If you receive Pension Credit or other income related 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 the Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit or if you're on a low income. It's a one-off discount on your energy bill, usually made between October and April. If you have a prepayment electricity meter, you can receive the discount as a voucher to top up your meter. Check with your energy supplier or ask an advice agency such as Age UK. Find out more at Gov.uk (see page 25).

Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) scheme

You could be eligible for financial help from the ECO scheme if you receive certain benefits such as Pension Credit or Attendance Allowance, you're a tenant living in social housing that's not energy efficient or your local council assesses you as needing financial support. To find out whether you're eligible, call Age UK Advice (see page 23). In Scotland, to find out about this and a similar Home Energy Efficiency Programmes scheme, call Home Energy Scotland (see page 25).



Switching energy supplier

Check your current energy tariff and shop around to see if you can get a better deal. See our free guide *Save energy, pay less* and our factsheet *Switching energy supplier* for more information.

What to do if you can't pay your bill

Contact your energy supplier if you're having trouble paying your bills. Companies should not disconnect all-pensioner households during the winter months. You may be able to set up a repayment plan, or have a prepayment meter installed.

For more information on getting support to keep your home warm see our free guide *Save energy, pay less* and our



factsheet *Help with heating costs*. In Scotland, contact Age Scotland (see page 23) for a similar version of this factsheet. For further advice contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (see page 24).

what next?

Contact your local Age UK to arrange a benefits check (see page 23) or use our online benefits calculator – go to www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck. See our free guide *More money*



in your pocket. In Scotland, see Age Scotland's free guide *Benefits maze* (see page 23).

Heating your home efficiently

Energy prices are high at the moment, but it's cheaper and easier to heat your home if it's well insulated and your heating works properly.

Insulation and draught proofing

Draught proof doors and windows, insulate the loft, lag the hot-water tank and pipes, and consider getting cavity-wall insulation. These measures will help to keep your home warm and your bills down – and you may be able to get financial help to put them in place. Visit Energy Saving Trust website for advice (see page 25) or call Age UK Advice (see page 23). In Scotland, contact Home Energy Scotland for advice (see page 25).



Check your heating system

Have your heating system serviced each year and check that it's working before the cold weather starts. If you're a tenant, your landlord should check your gas heating system and appliances for safety at least once a year.

Gas heating must be serviced by a Gas safe-registered engineer – ask to see their Gas Safe ID card, or note down their licence-card number. Visit the Gas Safe Register website or call the free helpline to find out how to check their licence, or to find a registered engineer in your area (see page 25).

**what
next?**

For more energy-saving tips see our free information guide *Save energy, pay less.*

Additional services

Energy suppliers and distribution network operators have Priority Services Registers for people who need extra help. This could be because you're over pension age or living with a long-term health condition or disability. You might need support temporarily following an injury or illness. If you sign up for priority services you could get extra help and support, such as a password scheme to protect you from cold callers and support if there's a power cut, such as regular updates.

You pay your gas and electricity bills to your energy supplier, and your distribution network operator is the company in charge of the supply to your area. Contact the Energy Networks Association to find out who your network operator is (see page 24).

To make sure you get as many services as possible you should join both your supplier's register and your distribution network operator's register, as they may offer different services.



Have your **heating system serviced** each year and check that it's working before the **cold weather starts**.

Helpful telephone numbers

Gas supplier

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Electricity supplier

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Water supplier

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Plumber

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My local pharmacy

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My GP practice

.....

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My local Age UK

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Other

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Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 022 3444

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0800 124 4222

www.agescotland.org.uk

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact resources@ageuk.org.uk

Care and Repair Scotland

Offers advice and assistance to help people repair, improve or adapt their homes.

Tel: 0141 221 9879

www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk

Care Information Scotland

Provides information about care services and carer support for people living in Scotland.

Tel: 0800 011 3200

www.careinfosotland.scot

Charis Grants

Directs people to grants to clear utility debts owed to certain energy providers.

Tel: 01733 421 021

www.charisgrants.com

Cinnamon Trust

Charity for older people and their pets. They have volunteers who may be able to walk your dog for you in icy conditions.

Tel: 01736 757 900

www.cinnamon.org.uk

Citizens Advice Consumer Service

A consumer advice and complaints service.

Tel: 03454 04 05 06

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer

Energy Networks Association

Contact them to find out who your network operator is.

Tel: 020 7706 5100

www.energynetworks.org

Energy Saving Trust

Provides online advice on saving energy.

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

www.eachhomecountsadvice.org.uk

In Scotland, contact **Home Energy Scotland**

Tel: 0808 808 2282

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland

Floodline

Free 24-hour service that provides flood warnings by phone, text or email.

Tel: 0345 988 1188

flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk

In Scotland, contact **Floodline (Scotland)**

Tel: 0345 988 1188

www.floodlinescotland.org.uk

Gas Safe Register

You can check if an engineer is on the register by visiting the website.

Tel: 0800 408 5500

If you suspect a gas leak, call the 24-hour

National Gas Emergency Helpline on 0800 111 999

www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Gov.uk

The government website of services and information that includes advice on taking care of yourself in winter.

www.gov.uk

NHS Choices

Provides web-based information about NHS services, healthy living and health conditions.

www.nhs.uk

In Scotland, contact **NHS Inform**

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

www.nhsinform.scot

NHS Smokefree

Provides help and advice to stop smoking.

Tel: 0300 123 1044

www.nhs.uk/smokefree

In Scotland, call **Quit Your Way Scotland**

Tel: 0800 84 84 84

www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/stopping-smoking

Trading Standards Institute

National consumer helpline for advice or to make a complaint. Use the online search directory to find an approved trader.

Tel: 03454 04 05 06

www.tradingstandards.uk/consumers

Winter Fuel Payment helpline

For information and application forms to claim the payment.

Tel: 0800 731 0214

www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment

Supporting the work of Age UK

Age UK aims to enable all older people to love later life. We provide vital services, support, information and advice to thousands of older people across the UK.

In order to offer free information guides like this one, Age UK relies on the generosity of its supporters. If you would like to help us, here are a few ways you could get involved:

1 Make a donation
To make a donation to Age UK, simply complete the enclosed donation form, call us on **0800 169 8787** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved**

2 Donate items to our shops
By donating an unwanted item to one of our shops, you can help generate vital funds to support our work. To find your nearest Age UK shop, visit **www.ageuk.org.uk** and enter your postcode into the ‘What does Age UK do in your area?’ search function. Alternatively, call us on **0800 169 8787**

3 Leave a gift in your will
Nearly half the money we receive from supporters come from gifts left in wills. To find out more about how you could help in this way, please call the Age UK legacy team on **020 3033 1421** or email **legacies@ageuk.org.uk**

**Thank
you!**

What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.



The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

