Damp and mould



Mould caused by condensation damp is characterised by black dots, like on this window recess.

There are three ways that your home can become damp:

1) Condensation
2) Penetrating damp
3) Rising damp

This leaflet looks at each in turn and suggests ways to prevent them.

1) Condensation

Condensation is the most common cause of damp. It occurs when moist air reaches cool surfaces – such as walls, ceilings and windows – and condenses back into water. Damp surfaces are the perfect breeding ground for mould.

We produce a lot of moisture through our everyday activities at home, such as showering, cooking and drying laundry .

To reduce condensation:

1) Heat your home as best you can.
2) Insulate where possible.
3) Ventilate all your rooms regularly
4) Reduce excess moisture.

Below is a useful checklist you can use to take action to reduce condensation and mould.

Condensation checklist

The majority of damp issues are caused by condensation. You can reduce condensation by **doing things differently** in your home **...**

Heating

- ☐ Make sure that the heating is working well. It may need a service or repair, or radiators may need bleeding.
- ☐ In winter, turn your heating on often enough to keep the home dry. **If you can't afford this, then do as many of the things on this checklist as possible.**

Insulation

- ☐ Consider where your home could be better insulated – loft, walls, windows. Our advisors can help (contact details below), or check out www.cse.org.uk/advice.

Continued →

Condensation checklist cont.

Ventilation

- [ ] Regularly open windows, particularly in the kitchen and bathroom.
- [ ] If you have extractor fans keep them clean and working correctly, and turn them on every time steam is produced.
- [ ] Keep trickle vents on windows open.
- [ ] Make sure vents and airbricks aren't blocked or covered up. If the vent has a cover, move it to the open position.
- [ ] Move sofas and other furniture away from the walls to allow air to circulate behind.
- [ ] Use a hygrometer (also called a humidity meter) to find out which rooms need to be ventilated regularly (see box below).
- [ ] Do not use portable gas heaters indoors as they make the air very moist.

Reducing moist air

- [ ] When cooking, keep lids on pans.
- [ ] Keep bathroom and kitchen doors closed to stop the moisture from moving around the home.
- [ ] Dry laundry outside. If this isn't possible, use the spin cycle on the washing machine twice.
- [ ] Vent your tumble dryer outside the home, or hang washing in a room with the door closed and a window open.
- [ ] Buy a dehumidifier (see box, below).

Dehumidifiers

Dehumidifiers can help resolve condensation issues in your home by removing moisture from the air.

They should be set to under 60% humidity, if possible. And doors and windows in the room where the dehumidifier is on should be kept closed.

Decent dehumidifiers start at around £100 and cost around 15p per hour to run.

On dry days, opening a window is just as effective as a dehumidifier.



Hygrometers

A hygrometer can measure how much moisture there is in the air in your home. This is known as the relative humidity (RH). The recommended RH level is between 40-60%; there is a risk of mould growth when RH goes above 60%.

Hygrometers can also be used to show what causes humidity in your home to rise (drying laundry inside, cooking etc) and what causes it to fall (opening windows, turning on extractor fans etc).

Hygrometers cost as little as £8.00.



Getting rid of mould in your home

If you don't clean mould quickly, it will spread to other areas of your home. To treat mould, follow the steps below:

1 Treat the visible mould with a spray containing bleach and allow to dry, then repeat.

2 Treat an area at least 1m wider than the mould patch with a spray containing bleach.

3 Repeat the treatment every time it reappears.

4 Dispose of furniture, soft furnishings and wallpaper that are very badly affected.



An average family of four produces around 10 litres of moisture a day through regular activities.

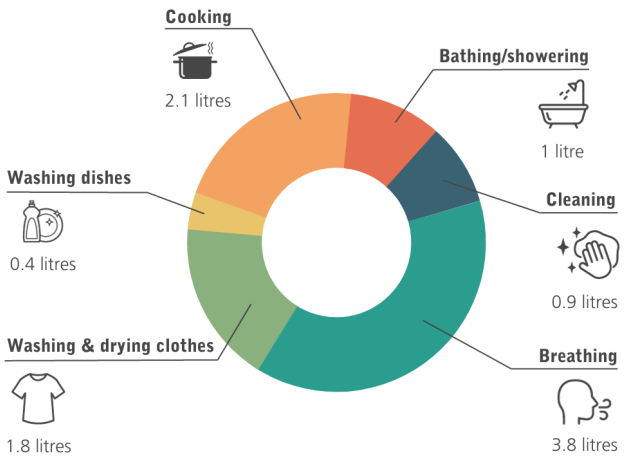


Image from Nicol, F. and Rudge, J. eds., 2005. Cutting the cost of cold: Affordable warmth for healthier homes. Routledge.

2) Penetrating damp

The second most likely cause of damp is penetrating damp. This is where moisture comes through the walls, roof, floor, doors or windows. Penetrating damp may get worse when it rains, especially if it's also windy.

A house can suffer from penetrating damp if there are issues with the building itself, for example:

- **Loose or missing tiles.**
- **Defective guttering and chimney flashing.**
- **Cracks in the render between bricks**
- **Rotting wood or gaps around doors and windows.**
- **High external ground levels.**

Be aware that identifying the cause can be difficult because water can travel horizontally as well as vertically, so the damp patch may not be where the water is coming into your house. If you can't find the cause of the damp, ask a damp specialist to do a survey of your property.

The solutions to penetrating damp are likely to be structural: sealing cracks in walls, replacing damaged roof tiles or roofing felt, repairing guttering, or the ground level where necessary. Sometimes these are DIY jobs, though in other cases you may need a professional builder, roofer or damp specialist.





Left: Penetrating damp can cause paint to flake. Right: Rising damp in wall can look like this, but can be difficult to diagnose.

3) Rising damp

Rising damp is the least likely cause of damp. But the solutions to it are often the most complex and involve building works.

It is often the case that damp is misdiagnosed as rising damp, when it is actually penetrating damp or even condensation. So make sure that you get advice from an experienced specialist.

Rising damp can occur on external walls where the damp-proof course – a horizontal barrier, typically of plastic or bitumen, installed within the wall to prevent moisture rising up from the ground – is broken or defective. Or where the ground outside has been raised to a level above the damp-proof course, for example, when a patio was laid down.

Older buildings weren't built with damp proof courses but were constructed of permeable building materials which allowed rising moisture to pass through the walls and evaporate. Often this works fine, but later building works such as adding a concrete floor can prevent moisture evaporating from the wall as it once did.

If you think you have rising damp, you need to consult a specialist.

Check list for landlords

- ☐ **Insulate** the property. This can increase the inside temperature so the air can hold more moisture before it condenses and you'll be less likely to have damp and mould.
- ☐ Ensure there are **extractor fans** in the kitchen and bathroom. Ideally these should be mechanical extract ventilators, which run at a low level all the time and respond to higher humidity levels.
- ☐ Install **trickle vents** on the windows if the current windows do not have them.
- ☐ Make sure there is a **kitchen and bathroom door** that can be shut to stop the moist air getting into the rest of the house. Also check there is a gap of around 1cm below all other internal doors to allow air to circulate around the house.
- ☐ Ensure that the **heating system** is serviced regularly and necessary repairs are made.
- ☐ Where possible, provide **outdoor space** for drying clothes.

This factsheet was updated in October 2025, using information, including energy prices, current at that time

To go to our Condensation, Damp and Mould webpage, scan the QR code or click the button.

Go to webpage

CSE

We're a charity (298740) supporting people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes.

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We offer free advice on domestic energy use to people in central southern and southwest England.

Contact us:

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See all our energy advice pages at www.cse.org.uk/advice