

Condensation

What is condensation?

Condensation is moisture that can cause rotting window frames, peeling wallpaper and mould on walls, carpets or clothes. It forms on cold surfaces and where there is not much air movement. You might see patches of black mould on windows, in corners, in or behind wardrobes, even on bedding and furnishings. It often forms on north-facing walls, and gets worse in winter. You might also notice a musty smell.

Condensation can encourage mould growth and dust mites, and increase the risk of illnesses like asthma and bronchitis.

What causes condensation?

There is always moisture in the air, but normally you can't see it. Condensation forms when air gets too full of moisture, or when it cools down quickly on cold surfaces. Condensation 'seeks out' cold places: warm, humid air produced by cooking, washing and drying clothes will go to areas like windowpanes, cold walls, and unheated rooms.

Condensation is caused by four things:

- Producing a lot of moisture – steam in the kitchen and bathroom, drying laundry
- Not enough ventilation – the moist air can't escape
- Not enough insulation – the home can't retain heat and has cold surfaces
- Not enough heating – more water vapour is held in warmer air than cold air

What can you do to reduce condensation?

Produce less moisture

- Avoid using paraffin or bottled gas heaters – they produce a lot of moisture
- Cover pans when cooking
- Dry laundry outdoors if you can, otherwise hang it in a room with the door shut and window open. Use the extractor fan if there is one
- If you use a tumble dryer, vent it to the outside or buy a DIY 'self-condensing' dryer kit

Let the moisture out

- Leave 'trickle' vents open whenever someone is in the room – these are small vents in the frames of modern windows
- Air rooms that people use regularly, especially bedrooms. A lot of moisture is produced by breathing
- Use extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens when cooking or drying laundry, and open windows when they steam up
- Close internal kitchen and bathroom doors when steam is being produced, to stop moisture spreading to the rest of the house
- Air cupboards and wardrobes, and avoid putting too much in them as this stops air circulating
- Leave a gap between furniture and walls

Insulate your home

- Fit wall and loft insulation to make the outside walls and ceiling warmer
- Draught-proof internal kitchen and bathroom doors to help keep moisture from spreading throughout the house

Heat your home

- Keep temperatures in all of the rooms above 15°C. This will cut down the risk of condensation forming on walls and fabrics (it may still form on windows)

What you must not do

- Never block air bricks or trickle vents
- Never completely block chimneys – fit a ventilation grille
- Never draught-proof windows in rooms where there is condensation or mould
- Do not draught-proof windows in kitchens or bathrooms unless the window has a trickle vent or there is an extractor fan

Condensation is not the only kind of dampness

Others are:

- water leaking from pipes, gutters, wastes or overflows
- water coming in through a crack in the wall or a missing roof tile
- rising damp which leaves a 'tidemark' on the wall, about a metre above the floor

These kinds of dampness are treated by repairing the fault. You may need specialist help. If none of these problems can be found, then it is likely that the house is suffering from condensation.

Safety: Never draught-proof rooms that have a cooker, boiler or gas or solid fuel heater without checking with a heating or draught-proofing installer. Fires and heaters need air – if there is not enough fresh air getting in you risk carbon monoxide poisoning.

**For more advice call
Home Energy Scotland
on freephone 0808 808 2282**