

A PRACTICAL AND HELPFUL GUIDE

Staying warm in winter at home



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The following suggestions on staying warm and managing comfort have been prepared to support you to stay warm during winter. Staying warm in homes can be especially difficult if you have ineffective home heaters, live in a generally 'cold' dwelling and/or if you are balancing heating needs and energy costs.

From years of research with Tasmanian households we understand that feeling cold can affect your state of mind, overall health, and productivity. However, there are a range of practical, low cost things that you can do can improve your comfort and to keep warm.

The suggestions are made with various accommodation types in mind. Some of you will be in your own or a family home, and many will live in rental accommodation. We hope you all have a home — if you are facing homelessness or are in insecure accommodation, please contact the **University Crisis Line** on **1300 511 709** or text **+61 488 884 168**

Websites with tips to help stay warm and comfortable:

1. The Australian Government provides advice on **winter comfort** and reducing **energy bills**.
2. Aurora Energy – one of our two Tasmanian electricity retailers provides **energy advice** for winter.
3. Origin Energy's suggestions on **smart ways to save in winter** are also helpful.
4. Sustainable Living Tasmania have **helpful energy related advice**.

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1. Layering/adding clothes

This is an obvious place to begin. Tip shops and second-hand shops all over Tasmania have affordable hats, gloves, and scarves. Warm socks and footwear are also important. There are only so many layers of clothes you can wear and still be able to do things, but warm heads, necks, hands, and feet are key to feeling warm all over.



2. Exercise

While we recognise that some people have difficulty exercising due to mobility or other challenges, if you can get moving in some way, you will be repaid with better comfort levels.

Exercise seems an obvious get warm tactic, but people often say they sacrifice it when they are busy with work. As little as five minutes of reasonably vigorous movement each hour makes a difference. You have three reasons to prioritise exercise daily: your physical health, your mental health, and to sustain your comfort levels.





3. Thinking about how you arrange your furniture and use your rooms

How you arrange furniture and how you organise your own position in a room can really affect your comfort. Heat flow and temperatures of surfaces are important to consider when setting yourself up for long periods in a room. Sitting in a draughty spot in a room limits the effect of heating—anyone who has sat in a high-ceilinged room with an opening into a draughty corridor might agree.

You can also feel cooler in winter when sitting near a colder surface. Therefore, sitting near cold windows or near an external wall can reduce your comfort. Floors are often cold in Tasmanian homes because they are usually uninsulated.

Warm shoes and slippers can help as can having a mat or a footstool under your feet. Positioning your couch or chair/s and your desk away from draughts and away from cold surfaces is useful.

If you have a desk that is open underneath, you can also consider blocking the air flow (under the desk) by draping a blanket at the back of the desk or using the blanket as a lap rug when you sit.



4. Managing moisture and mould

Moisture in dwellings can affect your comfort and health in negative ways. Moisture can come from rising damp in walls and floors because of problems with the construction of walls and floors. Commonly though, moisture builds up inside a house from breathing, cooking, showering, and laundering. Poorly ventilated houses tend to stay moist.

Cold air and cold surfaces create the conditions for moisture to condense on walls, windows, and other surfaces. It is worth drying your windows in the morning if they get wet overnight and throughout the day if necessary.

A window cleaner (squeegee) removes most of the moisture and an old towel, chamois or vegan-friendly chamois-like cloth, or recyclable paper wipes can help remove the rest.

Drying wet clothes and towels outside whenever possible helps to limit internal moisture accumulation. When moisture is a problem, it is useful to open up your windows and doors for 15 or 20 minutes at a time, during the warmest and driest part of the day.

Moisture accumulating on surfaces can grow mould and can make you unwell. Mould is too often tolerated in Australian and Tasmanian homes when it should not be. If you notice mould, make plans to remove it. If you can do so safely, you can clean mouldy surfaces yourself.

More information

Tenants Union information on mould.



5. Home improvements

Making improvements to your indoor space can really help. Can you reduce draughts, add heavy curtains (try those second-hand shops), construct pelmets, or add insulation to help to improve indoor comfort? Read on for more detail.

Reducing draughts is the easiest thing to do to improve comfort levels in winter. **Door snakes work** and can be made with remnant materials. Special draught proofing strips can be nailed or stuck to leaky doors and are very effective. For more information on draught proofing see **Sustainability Victoria's advice**.

Curtains are super helpful because they resist heat flowing out of the house through the windows, the weakest part of a house's building shell. The thicker and tighter-fitting the curtains, the better. In Tasmania, **minimum private rental standards** require bedrooms and living areas to have window covering for privacy.

Curtains provided for privacy may not be very thick. If you have lightweight curtains, consider adding another layer of curtain-like material at night. That addition could be as simple as hanging a blanket or sheet on top of the curtain. Please do consider safety when taking this step. If a child sleeps under the window, or a heater is installed under the window, for example, adding looser layers on curtains could pose a risk. Where windows are cold and curtain upgrades are hard to do, two other ideas might be useful.

First, you can use second-hand real estate signs and place them in windows and glazed doors overnight to limit the flow of heat out through glass. Used real estate signs are made of corflute, a fluted construction material made from a synthetic resin called polypropylene and can be purchased at the Tip Shop in Hobart (and there may be other sources around Tasmania). Sheets can be carefully cut to size with a large pair of scissors and layered up by sticking them together. Two real estate signs can be stuck together so the writing is hidden, which makes them a little tidier.

Second, bubble wrap can also be stuck to windows for winter, but it will obscure views during the day because usually it gets left on 24/7. Bubble wrap works well on windows that are out of the way, not regularly opened and not relied on for views.

Pelmets — box-like covers placed above windows and curtains — also stop heat flowing behind curtains and down cold windows. Remember that after hot air rises to the ceiling of a heated room, it is often wasted because it then sinks behind curtains and is cooled against the window.

Insulation can be added in ceilings, under floors and sometimes in walls, although this work can be challenging, especially in rental properties. If you are thinking about insulating, see the **Your Home guide's insulation advice**.



6. Heaters

The type of heating you have and the ways you use your heating can affect comfort and affordability. More information on **heater types and their pros and cons**.



Radiant electric heaters are the most commonly available heating, are often comparatively cheap to buy, provide direct warmth, and are typically plug-in. They often have a fan function as well to 'blow' heat around the room. Plug-in heaters typically cost more money to run because they are not wired into cheaper heating tariffs (not everyone has heating tariffs though). Radiant heaters tend to convert electricity directly to heat so for every 1kw of electricity going into the heater you get 1kw of heat out. These heaters can be unsafe if not used thoughtfully. Never cover them with anything at all.



Heat pump/air conditioners tend to heat the air first rather than the person but heat a room quickly and cheaply. They are commonly more expensive to purchase and need to be installed by an electrician (as they are wired-in). The efficiency of heat pumps varies but they are typically much more efficient than radiant heaters. For every 1kw of electricity going into the heater you may, for example, get 3 or 4kw of heat out. Because they rely on fans to circulate warmed air, they can create draughty circulation of air that can feel cold if not set up well.



Wood heaters/fireplaces provide a comfortable radiant heat and are sometimes the only heat source available in a Tasmanian home. Woodfires need to be maintained and watched while in use. It is easy to overheat a room with a woodfire. Wood will generate more heat and burn more effectively if it is well seasoned (not 'green' or moist). While you can order deliveries of wood, it is sometimes hard to know whether the delivery will be properly seasoned wood and it can be expensive. Smoke from fires can aggravate asthma.

Heater safety

Please always consider your safety when using heaters:

Every house must have working smoke alarms (by law). They warn you if there is a fire in your home and save lives. More information on **rental property smoke alarm rules**. More information on Tasmanian fire service **information on smoke alarms**.

Keep flammable and combustible items at least 2 metres from heaters – this includes keeping you and your desk away.

Electrical safety – do not use electric heaters if the unit, cords and/or plugs are damaged. Discontinue use of any heaters that are tripping safety switches. Make sure electric heaters are set up and positioned so they cannot melt power cords.

Never use outside heaters inside the house.

If buying a portable heater (plug in), make sure that it will switch off if it is accidentally knocked over.

More information

For more safety advice, please see Tasmanian Fire Service's Safe Habits for Heating information in their **Fire Safety at Home**. Wood heater information can be found in their **Home Fire Safety fact sheet**, and more fire safety information at their **Home Fire Safety** webpage.





7. Managing your energy bill

You might also be interested in being able to read your electricity meter (to work out your energy use) and about payment options. TasNetworks, the company that manages the Tasmanian electricity network, has some helpful **information about your meter**. Aurora explains the **information contained on an electricity bill**.

If you struggle to pay your electricity bill, it can be helpful to call your energy retailer. Aurora offers some **bill management advice**. Resources to help you manage your energy bills on a low income can be found at the **No Interest Loans (NILS) website**.

We hope that some of these suggestions are useful, helping you to stay warm this winter.