

Tackling condensation

With the autumn comes much cooler weather – windows and doors are shut to keep the cold out and, as the temperatures drop, the levels of humidity (or dampness) in your homes can rise. Air in the home naturally contains some moisture, even though you can't see or feel it. The higher the temperature of the air, the more moisture it can contain, but when this air suddenly cools down (for example when it hits a cold surface, such as a window pane) the moisture in the air turns to water droplets – or condensation.

Areas where there is little air movement (such as upper corners of rooms or behind large items of furniture) can also be prone to condensation.

Windows often steam up during cooking or when taking a bath or shower. This sort of condensation causes no long term trouble if the room is ventilated to remove excess moisture, but when condensation occurs on walls and furniture it can become a bigger problem, and eventually lead to mould growth.



Three main causes of problem condensation:

1 High levels of moisture in the air.

There is always some moisture in the air, but it can be increased by a number of day-to-day activities, including cooking, washing, using a tumble drier without an external outlet (unless it is self-condensing), drying washing indoors and even breathing!

2 Insufficient ventilation.

If the air in your home is unable to circulate freely it can increase your risk of condensation. However, too much ventilation can also lead to problems.

3 Cool temperatures.

The colder your home is, the more likely you are to suffer from condensation. In houses, the rooms above a heated living room benefit to some extent from heat rising through the floor. In bungalows and in most flats this does not happen. Some rooms may also be especially cold because they have a lot of outside walls or lose heat through a roof as well as walls.

How can I keep my home well ventilated?

Opening doors and windows (even if it is a small window and you close it when you go out) are simple ways to help keep your home ventilated. There are also other ways to limit moisture levels and improve the circulation of air around your home:

- 1 Shut the doors to your kitchen or bathroom when you are using them for cooking or washing – this way the warm, moist air won't be able to go to other rooms in the house;
- 2 If you have them, use extractor fans to fully ventilate the kitchen or bathroom. If you don't have extractor fans, keep doors to these rooms closed and open windows until the room has aired;
- 3 Cover pans when cooking – large quantities of steam can be created by one boiling saucepan;
- 4 Turn off the kettle as soon as it has boiled to limit the amount of steam created;
- 5 Dry washing outside whenever possible;
- 6 Wipe down window sills and windows to remove any sitting water or condensation;
- 7 Try to allow a space between the wall and any largish pieces of furniture to enable air to circulate more freely;
- 8 Prevent dampness in cupboards and wardrobes by keeping them ventilated. You may also find that if they are too cluttered air won't circulate properly – so don't over fill;
- 9 Make sure your tumble drier is vented outside;
- 10 Don't cover air bricks or ventilation grills.

How can I tell if I have condensation or if it's a different damp problem?

Rising damp, leaking plumbing and rain getting to the house (through the roof or around window frames) can normally be distinguished from condensation as they usually leave a 'tidemark'.

I have a problem with mould – how can I get rid of it?

Mould is a small fungus that thrives on damp areas in your home – especially wallpaper, furniture and clothing. Affected areas should be thoroughly cleaned and sterilised. If necessary, badly affected items may need to be removed completely. As well as cleaning it is important to prevent regrowth by identifying and treating the reason for the damp/condensation.

What can I do to avoid condensation?

The best way to reduce condensation is to increase the temperature of the house. This doesn't mean very expensive heating bills – most well insulated homes just need a relatively low constant temperature to reduce condensation. It's better to heat the whole house on a moderate temperature than to have just one or two rooms heated with the others left unheated. It's also advisable to keep the heating on low constantly, even if no one is home.