



Dressing for warmth

DLF Factsheet

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INTRODUCTION

Older people, the very young and those with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the cold. When considering ways to keep warm, the role of clothing must be considered together with methods of heating, life style, finance and the general environment. Where people try to keep warm simply by maintaining a room temperature, expenditure on heating can be considerable and other occupants who are not so susceptible to the cold can feel uncomfortably warm.

Dressing for warmth should be practised from the start of cooler days if it is to be of real benefit later in the year. Not only will it make a substantial difference to someone's ability to be comfortable during a cold spell but it will also makes a positive contribution to preventing the development of sub-clinical hypothermia.

At night, body temperature control mechanisms are at their least stable, and room heating is often switched off. Bedding absorbs considerable moisture from the air during each day, even though it is slept in each night. If a person sleeps in an unheated bed their body heat will be required to evaporate that moisture. Hot water bottles or electric blankets should be used to warm the bed for a couple of hours before it is used. An electric overblanket costs the same to run all night as boiling a kettle each night to fill a hot water

People can lose a lot of body heat both during dressing and undressing especially if this is done in a room which hasn't heated up properly or which has been allowed to cool down before you go to bed. When someone undresses the warm insulating layer of air round the body is lost and body heat has to be used to warm the new layer.

MICRO-ENVIRONMENT

One of the best ways of preventing hypothermia is to create a micro-environment or a warm corner within a room. A high screen placed around a chair, preferably one with both a high back and wings, will reduce draughts and encourage reflected heat. If lighting is adequate try to close curtains at dusk to improve insulation. The benefits of this warm corner can be further enhanced by careful clothing choice to make getting dressed as quick as possible and the clothing worn to be as insulating as possible.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Disability Rights Handbook (2005-2006) states that:

A clothing allowance of £169 a year is payable if you receive war pensioned disablement benefit, and your disability causes exceptional wear and tear to your clothing, e.g. because of incontinence or the use of an artificial limb.

Those who are eligible for income support or pension credit may be eligible for a social fund grant for extra clothing if it is essential to maintain independent living.

If you are eligible for a budgeting loan this can be used to help you to buy clothing and footwear. To apply for a loan, see form SF500 available from Jobcentre Plus offices or from the Benefit Enquiry Line.

Contact the 'Benefit Entitlement Check' service to find out if you are eligible for any winter fuel allowances or a heating rebate.

The government sponsored Warm Front Scheme is designed to help people who are over 60 or disabled or who live with someone who is over 60 or disabled, to keep warm in their homes in winter. They offer advice, insulation and grants.

Your local Age Concern or Citizens Advice Bureau will be able to give you advice on benefits and local schemes that could help keep your home warm.

HOW CLOTHING CAN HELP

Clothing keeps people warm by acting as an insulator or, more accurately, by enabling air to act as that insulator. A garment traps air between it and the skin. This is then warmed by body heat and prevents further heat loss.

Clothing generally cannot create warmth; it can only maintain your body warmth, so

movement and exercise are important to generate that warmth before you dress.

To be really warm it is not just a question of donning gloves and socks. The whole body needs to be insulated. While warm hands and feet may be the key to feeling comfortable, body warmth is actually achieved by keeping the trunk and limbs well covered.

Potentially one of the most dangerous misconceptions about keeping warm is that this is automatically achieved by wearing several layers of clothes. It is actually possible for several thick layers to keep someone less warm than several light fluffy layers. Heavy layers of clothes will have minimal amounts of air trapped between them because the weight of each layer pushes the air out.

The older clothes are, the less warm they are, as a fabric becomes both compressed, compacted and heavier with age. Very old jackets and coats were made with much heavier linings and interlinings than are used today and so do not keep people as warm.

FABRIC

It is not only what is worn but the fabric from which it is made and how that fabric has been constructed which determines how warm it keeps someone. Inside the home, fluffy knitted garments are both warm and comfortable. Outside in cold weather the same garment is useless as it allows even

the slightest breeze to penetrate so that the wearer gets cold very quickly.

Wool, though very warm, may be difficult to wash, expensive and relatively heavy. Garments made with acrylic fibres are virtually as warm, much lighter, cheaper and easier to wash. However, care must be taken when tumble drying something made of acrylic or it will lose its shape.

Any fabric with a piled, terry or textured finish should trap air between the layers and insulate against the cold. However, some corduroy or velvet fabric may look thick and warm, but check by holding it up to the light to see how closely woven the fabric is as some are very loosely woven and therefore do not trap air effectively. Closely woven fabrics like moleskin and drill will be warmer.

Jersey (knitted) fabrics in silk, cotton, viscose or synthetic fibres will trap air within their construction and therefore act as a good insulator, especially when worn layered with other garments.

Battery powered heated gloves, socks and jackets are available from specialist companies, contact your nearest clothing advice service or the Reynauds Association for suppliers.

SIMPLE, PRACTICAL ADVICE

There are many simple ways in which clothing can be used to minimise heat loss and help keep the body temperature stable

so enabling people to be safe and comfortable in a cold environment.

- First, make use of what you already have but, if possible, also buy one or two new items each winter which take full advantage of the constantly developing new advances in warm wear
- Cover as much of the body as possible, e.g. long sleeves, high necks, long trousers/tights
- The more thin layers worn the warmer the wearer will be. Long sleeved vests, long johns or combinations for both sexes. Ski departments and outdoor pursuit shops sell warm colourful versions
- Legs represent over one third of our body surface area. Trousers with a complete under layer consisting either of textured lining, long johns and socks or warm tights, will save heat
- On average 20% of heat is lost through a person's head and an older person with thin hair and less body fat over his/her skull will lose more. Wearing night caps will prevent heat loss at night, but they may not be to everyone's taste
- Dressing gowns and slippers should always be put on as soon as someone gets up, whether it is during the night or in the morning. Even the quick trip to the toilet in the middle of

the night without slippers or dressing gown could be disastrous if it results in a fall as the person may be unable to get assistance for some time. Short dressing gowns are safer for older people. Full length gowns, even though they will cover more of the legs, may cause the wearer to stumble when going up/down stairs

- When out of doors an older or disabled person may be as susceptible to the wind chill factor as a skier or cyclist who is normally recognised as being at risk. This is because they are slow moving and so exposed for longer to chilling winds. To minimise chilling, try to ensure that as much as possible of the body is covered. Hats, scarves, and gloves are essential and coats should be as wind proof as possible. Showerproof outer garments, such as raincoats and skiwear, offer a much greater resistance to the wind than a traditional winter coat or jacket. Skiwear is very light weight and well padded, but raincoats should always be worn with plenty of layers underneath

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Benefit Enquiry Line for People with Disabilities

Department for Work and Pensions
Correspondence

Unit Room 504

The Adelphi

1-11 John Adam St

London

WC2N 6HT

Tel: (0800) 882200

Fax: (020) 7712 2386

Minicom: (0800) 243355

Website www.dwp.gov.uk

Family Fund Trust

Unit 4 Alpha Court

Monks Cross Drive

Huntington

York YO32 9WN

Tel: (0845) 130 4542

Fax: (01904) 652625

Textphone (01904) 658 085

Email: info@familyfundtrust.org.uk

Website: www.familyfundtrust.org.uk

Eases the stress on families who care for very severely disabled children under 16 by providing grants and information related to the care of the child. Grants can be given for washing machines, holidays, leisure activities, driving lessons, bedding, clothing and other items related to the care of the child.

'Benefit Entitlement Check '

Tel: 0800 072 9006

Warm Front
www.warmfront.co.uk
Tel: 0800 316 2805.

Reynauds and Scleroderma Association
112 Crewe Road
Alsager
Cheshire
ST7 2JA
Tel: 0800 9172494
www.reynauds.org.uk

Equipment and Clothing Advice Service

Contact Assist UK to find your nearest
centre.
www.assist-uk.org.uk

Clothing Advice and Information Service
The Independent Living Centre
Isca House
Haven Road
Exeter EX2 8DS
Website: www.devon.gov.uk/ilc
Contact: Philippa Greenslade

Disabled Living
Redbank House
4 St Chad's Street
Manchester
M8 8QA
Tel: 0870 770 2866
Textphone: 0870 770 5813
Fax: 0870 770 2867
Email: general.info@assist-uk.org
Website: www.assist-uk.org.uk

Clothing Workshops

Bassettlaw Fashion Services
Unit 7 Canalside Workshops
Leverton Road
Retford
Nottingham DN22 ODR
Tel: 01777 860 206
Contact: Barbara Ackley

Clothing Solutions for Disabled People
Unit 1 Jubilee Mills
30 North Street
Bradford
BD1 4EW
Tel and Fax 01274 746 739
Email: enquiries@clothingsolutions.org.uk
Website: www.clothingsolutions.org.uk
Contact: Sandra Hunt

Special Occasions Clothes
27 Donald Road
London
E13 0QF
Tel: 020 84704868

We would like to thank the Clothing Advice Service at the Independent Living Centre in Exeter for assistance in updating these factsheets.



DLF online

The majority of DLF's advice is now online. If you would like advice and support to get online or information on local courses about getting online please visit one of the following websites.

Age UK

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/work-and-learning/technology-and-internet/>

Call **0800 169 8787**

BBC Webwise

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/>

Call **08000 150 950**

Digital Unite

<http://learning.digitalunite.com/category/using-the-internet/>

Call **0800 228 9272** Or you can write to them

Digital Unite Limited, Unit 2B Poles Copse, Poles Lane, Otterbourne, Winchester, SO21 2DZ

Go On

<http://www.go-on.co.uk/>

Call 0800 77 1234

UK online centres, The Quadrant, 99 Parkway Avenue, Parkway Business Park, Sheffield, S9 4WG

UK Online Centre

<http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/>

