

How to deal with condensation

Every home gets condensation at some time – it forms when warm moist air and steam produced during cooking, washing clothes and bathing, comes into contact with a cold surface.

It is quite normal to find your windows misted up in the morning after a cold night, but sometimes condensation can be a more serious problem. Cold surfaces such as outside walls, glass and even furniture and clothing can become damp and black mould might grow.



Is it condensation?

Condensation is not the only cause of damp. It can also come from:

- Leaking pipes, wastes or overflows
- Rain seeping through the roof where a tile or slate is missing, spilling from a blocked gutter, penetrating around window frames or leaking through a cracked pipe.
- Rising damp due to a defective damp-course or because there is no damp-course.

The above often leave a 'tidemark'.

If your home is newly built it may be damp because the water used during its construction (for example, in plaster) is still drying out.

If your home is damp for any of these reasons it may take weeks of heating and ventilation to dry out. Hiring a dehumidifier will help.

How to avoid condensation

The following steps will help you reduce the condensation in your home.

1. Produce less moisture, by:

- Covering pans and do not leave kettles boiling
- Avoid using paraffin and portable flueless bottled gas heaters - these put a lot of moisture into the air
- Dry washing outdoors on a line, or put in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or fan on
- Vent any tumble dryer on the outside, unless it is the self-condensing type. DIY kits are available for this.

2. Ventilate to remove moisture, by:

- Keeping a small window ajar or a trickle ventilator open when someone is in the room
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms, when in use by opening the windows wider. Or better still, use a humidistat-controlled electric fan. These come on automatically when the air becomes humid, and are cheap to run
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use, even if your kitchen or bathroom has an extractor fan
- If you replace your window units at any time, make sure that the new frames incorporate trickle ventilators.

- Ventilate cupboards and wardrobes. Avoid putting too many things in them as this stops the air circulating. Cut a ventilation slot in the back of each shelf or use slatted shelves. Cut 'breather' holes in doors and in the back of wardrobes and leave space between the back of the wardrobe and the wall. Where possible, position wardrobes and furniture against internal walls

3. Insulate, draught proof and heat your home

Insulation and draught proofing will help keep your home warm and will also cut fuel bills. When the whole home is warmer, condensation is less likely.

- Insulate your loft. Remember to draught proof the loft hatch but do not block the opening under the eaves.
- Consider cavity wall insulation.
- Consider secondary and double glazing of windows to reduce heat loss and draughts but you must ensure that there is some ventilation.
- In extremely cold weather, keep low background heating on all day.



Some words of warning

- Do not block permanent ventilators
- Do not completely block chimneys. Instead, leave a hole about two bricks in size and fit a louvered grille over it.
- Do not draught proof rooms where there is condensation or mould
- Do not draught proof a room where there is a cooker or a fuel burning heater, for example, a gas fire.
- Do not draught proof windows in the bathroom and kitchen.

How to avoid mould

- First treat any mould you may already have in your home. If you then deal with the basic problem of condensation, mould should not reappear.
- To kill and remove mould, wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash which carries a Health and Safety Executive 'approval number'. Follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely. Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets. Disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning can increase the risk of respiratory problems.
- After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould recurring

The only lasting way of avoiding severe mould is to eliminate dampness.

For further information about energy efficiency please contact:

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