



Section 6

Repairs and maintenance



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What repairs we will do, what repairs you should do

As your landlord, we are responsible for maintaining and repairing the structure of your home, plus plumbing, heating and electrical services. You are responsible for keeping the property in good order, keeping it clean and decorating to a reasonable standard. You are also responsible for

certain minor repairs. The following table shows what repairs we will do, and which ones you are responsible for.

Please note: we will only do repairs free of charge where these result from fair wear and tear through reasonable use of your home. Where we believe that repairs are caused by carelessness or deliberate acts, we will ask you to do the repair yourself.

| Repair | Comments | Responsibility | |
|--|--|----------------|-----|
| | | CHS | You |
| Inside your home | | | |
| Windows | | | |
| Window boards, sills & frames. | | • | |
| Window catches, locks, sash cords. | | • | |
| Curtain rails, poles, tracks and hooks. | | | • |
| Doors | | | |
| Internal doors and frames. | Unless damaged by you, your household, visitors or pets. | • | |
| Loose or damaged internal door handles, hinges and locks. | | | • |
| Adjusting doors for carpets. | Or other floor covering installed by you, such as laminate flooring. | | • |
| Lost or damaged keys, keys jammed or snapped off in locks – internal doors and window locks. | | | • |
| Floors | | | |
| Concrete floors. | | • | |
| Floor tiles, sheet vinyl covering. | Only if we have provided them. | • | |
| Fitted carpets, laminate flooring. | | | • |

| Repair | Comments | Responsibility | |
|--|---|----------------|-----|
| | | CHS | You |
| Floorboards. | | • | |
| Walls | | | |
| Major plastering and vents | | • | |
| Minor plastering – cracks and small holes (cracks up to 3mm wide). | | | • |
| Wall tiles. | Only if we have provided them. | • | |
| Skirting boards. | | • | |
| Decoration (internal). | | | • |
| Ceilings | | | |
| Decoration. | | | • |
| Hall | | | |
| Hat and coat rails and hooks. | | | • |
| Telephone socket. | | | • |
| Staircase | | | |
| Stairs, banisters, handrails. | | • | |
| Kitchen | | | |
| Kitchen cupboards, drawers, catches, hinges. | | • | |
| Cup hooks, hanging racks, shelves. | | | • |
| Worktops | Including seal around. | • | |
| Alterations to install your own appliances or fittings. | You must ask permission before doing this. You are responsible for maintaining anything you install yourself. | | • |
| Washing machine plumbing. | Not connector hoses. We do not connect or install your appliances. | • | |
| Your own appliances, fittings, plugs, leads etc. | Installation and connection (e.g. cookers) at your expense. | | • |
| Blocked kitchen sink. | | | • |
| Dripping tap. | | • | |
| Tap loose from sink. | | • | |
| Tap won't turn on or off. | If jammed on, turn water off at stop tap. | • | |

| Repair | Comments | Responsibility | |
|---|--|----------------|-----|
| | | CHS | You |
| Stop tap and valves. | | • | |
| Plug and chain to sink. | | | • |
| Gas cooker point. | You must arrange for the gas cooker to be installed by a Gas Safe qualified person at your own expense. This includes providing a bayonet fitting. | • | |
| Extractor fans. | | • | |
| Cooker hoods. | Only if we have provided it. Replacement filters and bulbs are your responsibility. | • | |
| Bathroom and toilets | | | |
| Dripping tap. | | • | |
| Tap loose from basin or bath. | | • | |
| Tap won't turn on or off. | If jammed on, turn water off at stop tap. | • | |
| Plug and chain to basin or bath. | | | • |
| Blocked basin, bath or shower waste. | | | • |
| Basin, bath, shower tray, including seal around. | Except unblocking waste. | • | |
| Shower hose and head. | | | • |
| Electric shower unit (excluding hose and head). | Only if we have provided it. | • | |
| Shower rail. | | | • |
| Shower curtain. | | | • |
| Toilet pan and cistern. | | • | |
| Blocked toilet | Do not put nappies or other large objects down the toilet. | | • |
| Toilet seat, mirrors, cabinets, toilet roll holder, towel rail. | | | • |
| Leak from water supply pipes, waste pipes, waste traps. | | • | |
| Bath panels. | | • | |
| Shelves in airing cupboards. | | • | |

| Repair | Comments | Responsibility | |
|--|--|----------------|-----|
| | | CHS | You |
| Heating and hot water | | | |
| Gas meter and supply, gas meter box. | Contact the gas company about meter box repairs. | | • |
| Gas boiler – servicing, repairs and maintenance. | You are responsible for re-lighting the pilot light. | • | |
| Hot and cold water tanks and overflows, water pipes. | | • | |
| Immersion heater. | | • | |
| Radiators and valves. | You are responsible for bleeding radiators. | • | |
| Heating controls – time clocks, programmers, thermostats. | You are responsible for re-setting controls. | • | |
| Gas fires. | Only if we have provided them. | • | |
| Electric fires. | Only if we have provided them. | • | |
| Removing radiators while decorating. | This must be done by a qualified person. | | • |
| Storage heaters. | | • | |
| Electrical | | | |
| Electric meter and supply, electricity meter box. | Contact the electricity company about meter box repairs. | | • |
| Consumer unit (fuse box). | You are responsible for resetting a tripped switch. | • | |
| Wiring, sockets, fixtures and light fittings. | Only if provided by CHS, not dimmer switches. | • | |
| Light bulbs, fuses, fluorescent tubes and starters, dimmer switches. | We will replace light bulbs in communal areas. | | • |
| Pull cord strings. | | • | |
| Mains wired smoke alarms. | | • | |
| Smoke alarms. | You must test, and change the battery if needed. | • | |
| TV aerials and sockets. | Unless communal (shared) aerial. | | • |
| Satellite TV dish. | Permission needed. | | • |
| Intercom and door entry systems. | | • | |

| Repair | Comments | Responsibility | |
|--|---|----------------|-----|
| | | CHS | You |
| Outside your home | | | |
| Roofs | | | |
| Chimneys. | | • | |
| Roofs including tiles, slates, flashings. | | • | |
| Fascia boards, soffits, barge boards and other external timber . | | • | |
| Canopies and porches over doors. | Only if we have provided them. Not including glazing. | • | |
| Drains and pipes | | | |
| Guttering, rainwater pipes, gullies, grids. | You are responsible for cleaning leaves, garden waste etc. from gullies. | • | |
| Drains, drain covers and grids. | Except where you have blocked the drain by misuse. | • | |
| Soil pipes | Except where you have blocked the soil pipe by misuse. | • | |
| Walls | | | |
| External walls, mortar and wall finishes, cladding. | | • | |
| Foundations. | | • | |
| Garden walls. | Only if we built them. | • | |
| Garages and outbuildings. | Only if we built them. | • | |
| Windows | | | |
| Window frames, sills. | | • | |
| Glazing in windows and doors. | Where caused by criminal damage and reported to the police (crime number required). | • | |
| Glazing in windows and doors. | All other reasons. | | • |
| Doors | | | |
| Entrance doors, hinges and frames. | | • | |
| Entrance door locks, handles, latches, letterboxes, draught excluders. | | • | |

| Repair | Comments | Responsibility | |
|---|---|----------------|-----|
| | | CHS | You |
| Door knockers, bells, door numbers. | | | • |
| Door entry systems | Only if we fitted them. | • | |
| Repairs to damage caused by forced entry if you get locked out. | | | • |
| Lost door keys – lock change. | | | • |
| Lock change after tenant is a victim of crime. | You must report to police and obtain a crime number before we will do the work. | • | |
| Communal areas | | | |
| Hallways, landings, stairs, refuse chutes, doors, locks. | Including light bulbs in communal areas. | • | |
| Private Gardens and boundaries | | | |
| Garden maintenance, removal of rubbish. | | | • |
| Footpaths, hard standings, paving, patios, ramps, rails, steps. | Only if we or Social Services installed them (e.g. a wheelchair ramp). | • | |
| Outbuildings, sheds. | Only major repairs and if we installed them. | • | |
| Fencing, gates | Only if we installed them. You must renew gate catches. | • | |
| Gardens and boundaries | | | |
| Replacement locks and padlocks to garages and outbuildings. | | | • |
| Boundary marker (concrete post and line wire, fences, gates). | Not minor repairs. | • | |
| Clothes posts, lines, rotary driers. | We will repair communal (shared) rotary driers which we installed. | | • |
| Water butts. | | | • |

What to check before you report a repair

Please check the following before you contact us to report a repair:

- Is the repair your responsibility?
Please check the table at the beginning of this section, to see if it is your responsibility or ours
- Was the thing that needs repairing put in by a previous tenant? If so, please see the note on 'Gifted and non-standard items' section
- Do you know what the problem is?
Please give us as much information as possible to help us order the right repair
- Check the information in: **How to do it yourself: useful advice about everyday 'Repairs and Maintenance'** at the end of this section

Gifted and non-standard items

Some of the fixtures and fittings in your home may have been put in by previous tenants, and may differ from what we would normally provide. If the items are in good and safe condition, our normal practice is to ask the incoming tenant if they wish to keep them, and if they do, we make a gift of the items to the tenant. A list is made of the items, and the tenant and CHS sign the list to agree that the items will not be maintained or serviced by CHS.

Gifted items fall into 2 categories:

- 1 Fixtures and fittings that we would normally provide, such as kitchen units, worktops, bathroom suites etc., but which are not the standard type that we would provide
- 2 Items that we would not normally provide, such as fitted wardrobes, cooker extractor hoods, garden sheds, patio paving etc. (this is not a complete list – please ask your Housing Officer for more information)

Our policy on the repair and replacement of these items is as follows:

Fixtures and fittings that CHS would normally provide, but which are not the standard type that we would provide

We will maintain any non-standard item, in line with our repairing obligations, only where it is cost-effective for us to do so. Where the cost of repairing a non-standard item would be more than the cost of repairing a standard item, you will be given the choice of doing the repair yourself or accepting replacement with a standard CHS fixture or fitting.

Fixtures and fittings that CHS would not normally provide

Where you have accepted responsibility for something that CHS would not normally provide, and that item later needs to be repaired, replaced or removed, you will be responsible for doing this, and for any 'making good' (repairing damage to walls, floors, ceilings, decoration etc.) that this involves.

If you smell gas

- Open doors and windows to get rid of the gas
- Do not use any electrical switches – on or off – including the doorbell
- Do not smoke
- Do not use matches, lighters or anything with a naked flame
- Check to see if a cooker ring or gas oven has been left on unlit. If so, turn it off, and do not try to relight it until all smell of gas has gone
- If the leak cannot be stopped, or if you are unsure whether it has been stopped, turn the gas supply off at the meter and phone the gas emergency service immediately – **phone 0800 111 999**

Burst or leaking pipe

- If the leak is serious, turn the water off at the main stop tap (this is usually under the kitchen sink or in a cupboard in the kitchen). The stop tap looks like this:



Turn it to the right to turn the water off.

- If electrics are affected, turn off the electricity at the consumer unit (fuse box)

Phone: 0300 111 3555
(24 hours for emergencies)

How to report a repair

Phone: 0300 111 3555
(24 hours for emergencies)

Email:
repairs@chsgroup.org.uk
non-emergency repairs only

Minicom (for hearing impaired):
01223 713784

Fax: 0300 111 3556

In person at our office:

CHS
Endurance House
Chivers Way, Histon
Cambridge
CB24 9ZR

See a map in the 'contact us' section

You can also write to us at the address above, although you should only request a repair in writing if your repair is not urgent.

What you need to tell us

When you report a repair, please tell us:

- Your name (and the tenant's name if you are phoning on their behalf)
- The address of the property
- A contact phone number, including a mobile number if you have one
- A clear description of the problem
- When we can get access to do the work
- Any special circumstances, for example, if you or someone who lives with you needs time to get to the door

Emergency repairs when the office is closed

We operate an emergency service when our office is closed. Calls to our repairs phone line will be put through automatically to the emergency service.

Phone: 0300 111 3555

(24 hours for emergencies)

Emergency repairs are repairs that have an immediate and severe health, safety or security risk, and/or where serious damage is taking place to the property. If you use the service when it is not necessary, you may be charged with the extra cost of carrying out the repair out of hours.

When will the repair be done?

We prioritise repairs by placing them into two categories: Emergency or Non-Emergency. When you report a repair, we will let you know which category we put your repair in.

We will confirm this in writing, and send you a form that you can use to give us feedback when the repair is done. We always aim to make sure that people with special needs, like older people or those with disabilities or a serious illness, receive priority.

Repair Categories

Emergency repairs - within 24 hours

These are repairs that could put your health, safety or security, at risk, and/or could cause serious damage to the property. If it is outside of office hours, we will normally make the problem safe, then complete the repair during normal working hours.

Examples of emergency repairs include:

- Severe water leak through a ceiling
- Burst pipes
- Blocked main drains
- Unsafe electrical fault likely to cause injury or fire
- Complete loss of electrical power or light
- Complete loss of heating in cold weather (31 October – 1 May) or at any time if resident is elderly or vulnerable
- Complete loss of hot water
- Non-secure external door or ground floor window
- Blocked soil pipe (where the toilet is found to be blocked, you will be charged for the cost of the work, plus an administration charge)
- Offensive graffiti

Non-Emergency Repairs – when YOU want it

These are repairs that may affect your comfort or convenience, or which if left could become a risk to people's safety, or cause damage to the property. It is our aim to make an appointment for the repair at a time that is most convenient to you.

Examples of non-emergency repairs include:

- Partial loss of electrical power or light
- Partial loss of heating or hot water
- Minor leak from water pipe or radiator
- Leaking overflow
- Repairs to stairs or floors if potentially dangerous
- Door entry phone not working
- Non-working extractor fan in kitchen or bathroom if no other ventilation (e.g. opening window)
- Tap that cannot be turned on
- Plastering
- General carpentry work
- External carpentry and roofing repairs (where property watertight)
- Repairs to external brickwork, paths, steps, fencing
- Routine plumbing jobs such as bathroom fixtures, loose taps, guttering
- Doors or windows sticking

Minor planned repairs

We will schedule this work to be completed as part of a planned programme of minor works at a later date. In a small number of cases we may tell you that we have noted your repair request and will be doing the work later. This is because the repair does not need doing straight away, and it will be more economical for us to do it as part of a planned programme of minor works.

For example:

- Renewing old fencing
- Insulation work and other energy-efficiency work
- External doors and windows

Appointments

For Non-Emergency repairs we aim to give you an appointment, morning or afternoon, when our contractor will call to do the repair. We will normally agree this with you when you report the repair. For heating and some other repairs, our contractor will contact you directly to arrange an appointment. **If you are unable to keep an appointment, please contact CHS or the contractor as soon as possible so we can make another appointment and avoid a wasted journey.**

Morning appointments: 8:30am to 1pm

Afternoon appointments: 12pm to 5pm

Repairs we will charge you for

If your repair is needed because:

- You have neglected your home
- You, a member of your family or a visitor, have deliberately damaged your home
- You, a member of your family or a visitor, have accidentally damaged your home

- It was due to criminal damage and you have not obtained an Incident Number from the police (we may make some exceptions, for example where domestic abuse is involved)
- The repair is something you are responsible for doing under the terms of your tenancy agreement (see 'What repairs we will do, what repairs you should do' section), but we have agreed at our discretion to do the work.

We will charge you for the cost of the repair plus an administration charge.

If we do this, we will:

- Let you know if we are going to charge you for the work and explain why
- Ask you to sign to say that you agree to pay for the repair later when we send you a bill

Gas servicing and safety

Under the Gas Safety Regulations, we must make sure that all gas appliances in our properties are serviced at least every 12 months. We are responsible for:

- Making sure gas appliances and flues are kept in a safe condition
- Yearly maintenance and safety checks
- Making sure we keep records and issue Gas Safety Certificates to you
- Making sure all installations, maintenance and safety checks are done by a Gas Safe registered person



We only employ Gas Safe registered gas fitters

How we arrange your yearly gas service

Shortly before your gas service is due, our contractor will write to you to tell you the date your service will be done. If this date is not convenient, you should contact the contractor and arrange a different date. You can also choose a morning or afternoon appointment. After your gas service has been carried out, you will be sent a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate, which you should keep in a safe place.

You must allow us into your home to do the gas appliance service, to protect you, your family and your neighbours. If you do not give our contractor access for servicing, we may take legal action to get access. You would have to pay any legal costs.

Faulty gas appliances which are not maintained regularly can become dangerous, and can give off carbon monoxide gas. You cannot see, taste or smell this gas, but it can kill. For your own safety you should not sleep in a room containing a gas appliance, such as a gas fire, boiler or wall-mounted heater.

Gas servicing helps to keep you safe: help us to help you.

Planned and cyclical maintenance

Planned maintenance is work done to replace building parts that have reached or are reaching the end of their useful life.

Examples of planned maintenance we do include:

- Replacement windows and external doors
- Electrical rewiring or upgrading of whole properties
- Replacement kitchens and bathrooms
- Insulation and other energy efficiency measures

Cyclical maintenance is work that is carried out on a regular cycle to prolong the life of building components, and avoid expensive repairs or replacement. Planning work in this way, and organising it into larger contracts, helps us keep costs down and keep your home in good condition.

Examples of the cyclical maintenance we do include:

- Painting of wooden window frames and other exterior woodwork – every 5 – 7 years
- Decoration of communal hallways and other inside areas – every 7 years
- Gas servicing and smoke alarm maintenance - annually
- Testing of electrical installations in properties – every 10 years

How we tell you about cyclical and planned maintenance programmes

We put details of our planned maintenance programmes in our customer newsletters.

We will notify you in writing if your property is included in the programme in February/March explaining what we are going to do. Our contractor will then contact you shortly before the work is due to start, and organise a time that is most convenient for you. We try to keep disruption to a minimum, and our contractors work to a code of conduct.

Estate services

Gardening and estate maintenance works are provided by CHS to communal areas of estates, schemes and projects, for which customers pay a service charge. Gardening and estate maintenance includes the following services:

- Grass cutting
- Maintenance of shrub beds including pruning and weeding
- Clearing litter and rubbish from shrub beds, pathways and car parks
- Weeding and sweeping pathways and car parks
- Clearing large items of litter and rubbish from shrub beds, pathways and car parks.

This service standard is linked to the Service Standard for Service Charges.

Our Commitments – we will:

- Provide you with details of the services you are paying for
- Tell you who is providing the services
- Tell you when the services will be delivered
- Meet regularly with your estate inspector (a resident living at the scheme) to check the quality of the service being delivered, and propose any changes

- Consult you before making any significant changes to the services or how they are being delivered. We will tell you the reasons for the changes, any changes to the service charge you pay, and provide you with written confirmation of the changes before they are made
- Get regular feedback from customers and estate inspectors on the quality of the service being delivered, and tell you about what action we have taken to improve service delivery where necessary
- Provide advice to the Society on areas to be replanted. Customers will be consulted fully on any proposed changes, including the costs

What to do if you are unhappy with the repairs service

We aim to provide a high quality service at all times. However, we recognise that there will be times when customers believe that our services fall short of the standards set. When this happens, it is important that we hear about it so that we can put things right. As well as putting things right, we will improve our procedures and systems to prevent the same problems happening again.

There are a number of ways you can tell us if we get something wrong:

- **Phone our Customer Services Team on 0300 111 3555.** If they cannot deal with your problem, they will put you in touch with someone who can
- **Email your comments to: help@chsgroup.org.uk**
Please tell us why you are not happy and what you would like us to do to put things right

Write to us or visit us at:

CHS
Endurance House
Chivers Way
Histon
Cambridge
CB24 9ZR

You can complain yourself, or a friend or relative can complain on your behalf (with your permission).

Our commitment – our contractors will:

- Provide an annual list of visits at the beginning of April each year
- Carry out the works as set out in the list. If the contractor is unable to attend on the dates listed, new dates for the visit will be provided to the Society within one week of a visit being missed
- Provide reasons for missed visits or any changes to the list
- Make sure that all their operatives will carry identification, and will sign in and off site as necessary. The operatives will be polite, courteous and make due allowance for customers' needs and wishes, and provide good customer care. In Supported Housing Schemes, operatives shall take account of instructions from the Manager
- Leave an agreed feedback form with the estate inspector after each visit
- Carry out the works to the agreed specification
- Provide quotations for works outside of the agreed specification within two weeks of a request being made

Please see the 'Contacting us' section of this handbook for full details about how to make a complaint.

How to do it yourself: useful advice about everyday repairs and maintenance

No electricity

- Check if your neighbours are also affected – there may be a power cut. If there is, call the electricity company
- If you have a card meter, is there any credit on the meter?
- Check your consumer unit (fuse box) – a switch may have tripped. Reset the trip switch, following the instructions below. If it keeps happening, **call us for advice. 0300 111 3555** (24 hours for emergencies)

How to reset a trip switch

Open the cover on the consumer unit (fuse box) to show the trip switches (see the picture below). Check which switches are in the OFF position and put them back to the ON position.



Switches

If the switch trips again

The most common cause of a switch tripping is a faulty appliance, such as a kettle, toaster, electric cooker etc., or a faulty immersion heater. It can also be caused by too many appliances being plugged into the same circuit, or by a blown light bulb. To find out what is causing the switch to trip, follow these steps:

- Note which set of lights or sockets is not working – e.g. the downstairs lights or sockets
- If it is a lighting circuit, check if any bulbs have blown and replace them
- If it is the sockets, unplug all the appliances on that circuit and switch off the immersion heater
- Switch the tripped switch to the ON position, then plug in the appliances one by one until the trip goes again. Leave that appliance unplugged. Finally, if the appliances do not trip the switch, turn on the immersion heater. If the immersion heater causes the trip to switch, please phone our repair service
- If one of your appliances caused the trip to switch, either have it repaired by a qualified engineer or replace it with a new one
- If you cannot sort the problem out yourself, please contact us

Please be aware, however, that if we send someone out to fix your electrics, and we find that the problem was caused by a faulty appliance owned by you, we will charge you the cost of the call-out plus a 15% administration charge

Blocked sinks – how to avoid them getting blocked and how to unblock them

Kitchen sinks

Kitchen sink waste pipes can easily get blocked by cooking fat and grease, together with food scraps, vegetable peelings and other solids. To avoid the sink becoming blocked:

- Never pour cooking fat or grease down the sink, e.g. from mince meat, sausages, bacon, roasts etc. Pour the fat into a container, such as a metal or glass bowl, wait for it to set hard, then scrape it into the bin
- Buy a sink strainer. This is a metal disc with holes in that fits over your plug hole. It catches food scraps and peelings and stops them going down the drain. When it gets full, empty it into the bin. These are cheap – as little as £1 each



A sink strainer

How to clear the sink if it gets blocked

There are two main ways to unblock a sink – with chemicals and with a plunger. A 'Which?' magazine test in June 2009 found that plungers were much better at clearing blockages than chemicals. 'Which?' recommended a power plunger like this (cost around £10):



But traditional plungers like this worked almost as well (cost £2-5)



Plungers are also safer than chemicals, and cheaper in the long run.

How to use a plunger to unblock a sink or bath

- 1 Block up the overflow with wet tissue or similar. This prevents the air which is going to be forced down the trap from escaping from the overflow



- 2 Using a suitable plunger, place the end completely over the plug hole for the sink or bath. Ensure there is some water in it to create a seal.



- 3 Push down on the plunger several times with both hands, this will force water through the waste pipe and dislodge the blockage.



Power plunger

Another variation on the plunger is a power plunger. To use one of these, fill the sink or bath with a little water and ensure that the overflow is blocked as in the picture above.

Place the end of the power plunger over the plug hole and pull up the handle; this will suck in some water.

Now push the handle down fast and a jet of water will be forced through the waste pipe and this should remove any blockages. It may be necessary to do this a few times.

Baths and bathroom sinks

Baths and bathroom sinks tend to get blocked with a mixture of soap, toothpaste and hair. To avoid the sink or bath becoming blocked, buy a hair trap. This sits over the plug hole/drain and stops the hair going down and blocking the waste pipe. These are cheap – they usually cost £2-3 from any hardware shop and some pet supply shops. Empty the trap into the bin when it starts to get blocked up with hair.



A hair trap

How to keep sinks and baths running freely

You can help keep sinks and baths running freely by flushing the waste pipes through with boiling water and washing soda crystals. Washing soda crystals can be bought from supermarkets and hardware shops. Empty the sink of water and pour $\frac{1}{2}$ a packet of washing soda crystals into and around the plug hole. Bring a kettle of water to the boil and pour the whole kettle full down the plug hole. The hot water will dissolve the crystals, and the washing soda solution will clean the waste pipes of built-

up fat, soap and toothpaste. **Note: never use caustic soda.** This is very dangerous and it can damage plastic waste pipes.

Blocked toilets – how to avoid them getting blocked and how to unblock them

To avoid the toilet becoming blocked:

the only things that should go down the toilet are human waste and toilet paper. You should never put nappies, baby wipes, sanitary towels, cotton buds or cotton wool down the toilet: wrap them in paper and put them in the bin. Toilet blocks in plastic cages that hang from the rim of the toilet can sometimes fall in and block the toilet, so we recommend that you do not use these.

Even if you take these precautions, toilets sometimes become blocked by heavy deposits and tissue paper. The blockage usually occurs in the bend behind the toilet:



How to unblock a toilet

To unblock a toilet you will need:

- A plunger or power plunger (see above). Use a plunger without a metal disc, as these can damage the toilet
- A pair of rubber gloves

What to do

Do not keep flushing the toilet as this can eventually cause the toilet to overflow. If the toilet is full of water, bale the water out into a bucket using a cup or similar, leaving a normal amount in the bottom.

Put some newspaper or old towels on the floor around the toilet, in case some water splashes out.



To clear the blockage you need to force water down the trap, which will usually dislodge the blockage. This can be done with a suitable plunger, by giving it 10-15 hard pushes with both hands. Be prepared to be splashed a little. Ensure the water in the bowl is pushed at force through the trap and this should clear the blockage.

If the toilet is still blocked

You can try to break up the obstruction using a piece of wire (from a wire coat hanger), or you can buy a plumber's snake. This is a coiled metal wire with a handle on one end and a metal head on the other. You put the head end down the toilet and turn the handle to break up the blockage. Make sure you buy one that is suitable for use in a toilet, and take care not to scratch the bottom of the toilet. Toilet snakes cost £10-15 from hardware shops.



A typical plumber's snake

How to set your heating and hot water controls

Advice on how to set your heating and hot water controls can be found at the end of Section 8 of the handbook under Energy efficiency in the home,

No hot water or no heating

If you have central heating (a boiler with radiators) try the following:

- Room Thermostat (if fitted) - this will normally be in the hallway, if this is turned down or your home is sufficiently warm, the heating may not come on
- Thermostatic Radiator Valves (if fitted) -if all the valves have been turned to the * symbol they will not allow the radiators to become hot (except the radiator without one which should be hot). Turn them to 3 and see if the radiators become warm
- Timer / Programmer - has this been set correctly? Check the time of day (24hr clock), the on/off times of the radiators, and if it is not a combination boiler (combi).
- Has there been a power cut? When the power is off most central heating boilers will not work. If the electricity supply is off or has been off for a long time, the timer / programmer clock may need to be reset using the 24hr clock

- Has the electric switch which is near the boiler been switched off? If it has then the boiler will not work
- Do you have enough credit in the gas and / or electricity meter? If you have run out of credit and have used the emergency credit in either meter then your heating and hot water will not work. Has the gas supply been cut off?

If you have electric heating (electric storage heaters) try the following:

- Are the electric switches near the storage heaters turned on?
- Is the Input dial on the storage heater (may be called "Auto-set control", or "Charge") at the right setting?
- Is the timer that sets your water heating to come on and go off set to the correct time? If you have had a power cut it may need to be re-set
- Is the switch to your immersion heater turned on?
- Do you have enough credit in the electricity meter? If you have run out of credit and have used the emergency credit in the meter then your heating and hot water will not work

Condensation and mould: how to avoid it and how to deal with it

What is condensation?

There is always some water in the air, even if you cannot see it. As the air gets cooler it can hold less water, so droplets of water appear, especially on cold surfaces. This is known as condensation. Everyday examples of condensation are when you see your breath in cold weather, or when the mirror and windows mist up when you have a bath.

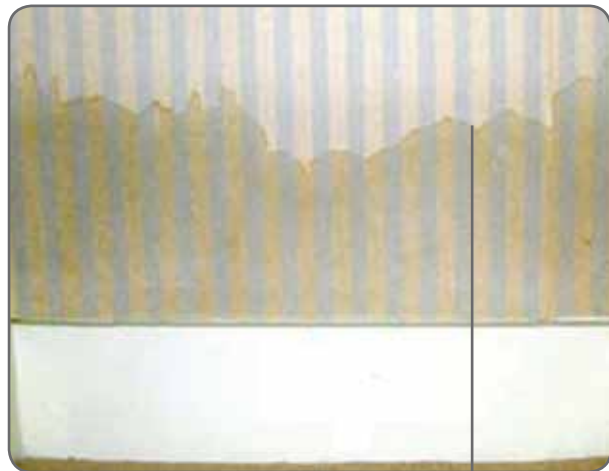


Where does condensation happen?

Condensation can happen on any surface that is cold enough. It usually happens in places where there is little air movement, such as in corners of rooms, behind large pieces of furniture and in wardrobes and cupboards. It also appears around windows and on outside walls. Soft furnishings, such as curtains, carpets, sofas and beds, can also have condensation form on them, and often absorb moisture from the air.

How can I recognise condensation?

Other forms of dampness such as rising damp and leaks from plumbing or through the walls or roof often leave “tidemarks” or lines on the wall, as shown in the photo below.



Rising damp tidemark

Condensation does not leave a “tidemark”. Condensation often leads to mould growth. Mould can sometimes happen because of dampness caused by leaks, but rarely with rising dampness. If it is cold and the dampness appears in the areas listed earlier, then there is a good chance that it is condensation. Condensation tends to be worse in cold weather. Other forms of dampness tend to be worse in wet weather, except for plumbing leaks.

The pictures below show mould growth on walls and ceilings caused by condensation



The picture below shows mould in a bathroom cupboard



How can I prevent condensation?

To prevent condensation you need to:

- 1 Reduce the amount of water going into the air in your home
- 2 Increase the ventilation (air going in and out) and heating of your home

Reduce the amount of water going into the air



In the kitchen

- Put lids on boiling pans and don't leave kettles to boil
- Use extractor fans or open the window slightly when you are cooking
- Keep the door closed when you are cooking, even if you have an extractor fan, to stop moisture reaching other rooms

Drying clothes

Dry clothes outside if possible



If you have to dry clothes inside,
dry them on a rack in the bathroom.
Keep the door closed and the window
slightly open



If you use a tumble dryer,
make sure the vent hose (if it has one) goes
outside, or use an indoor vent kit



**Never dry clothes on radiators or in front
of a fire or a heater**

Heating

Never use portable gas or paraffin heaters
because these put a lot of water into the air



In the bathroom

Use extractor fans or open the window slightly when you use the shower or run a bath, and afterwards until all the steam has gone



- Run the cold water into the bath before the hot water – this helps to reduce the amount of steam created
- Keep the bathroom door shut during and after you shower or take a bath, even if you have an extractor fan to stop moisture reaching other rooms

Wipe up water on windows and sills

Wipe up any water that gathers on windows and sills every morning

- Wring the cloth out rather than drying it on a radiator



Ventilate – let the air in (and out)

It is important to remove condensation and excess moisture by ventilating rooms. You can ventilate a room without making draughts or causing it to become cold. To do this, you may only need to open the window slightly or open the trickle vent that can often be found on new UPVC windows. This allows warm (but moist) air to escape to the outside and let in cool (but dry) air. Make sure large ground floor windows are shut when you go out.



Let the air move around inside your home

Clear window sills of clutter that will restrict opening the window

- Leave space between the back of furniture and cold walls
- Place furniture against inside walls if possible
- Ventilate cupboards and wardrobes and avoid overfilling them as this prevents air circulating
- Leave bedroom and living room doors open to let the air move around

Heat your home a little more

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm and avoid condensation is to keep low background heat on all day, rather than short bursts of high heat when you are in the house. Make sure that bedrooms and any unused rooms are heated – use the radiator valves to ensure a low level of heat.

- Put the heating on for at least 3 hours at a time
- Set the heating to come on an hour before you get up, and go off an hour after you leave for work. In the evening, set it to come on an hour before you get home, and go off an hour after you go to bed

Getting rid of mould

If mould grows on your walls, ceilings etc, this is what you need to do:

- Do not disturb mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning. This can increase the risk of breathing problems
- Wipe off mould growth immediately with a wet cloth. Do not use washing up liquid
- To kill and remove mould growth, wipe down affected areas with a fungicidal wash or spray. This is available from a hardware or DIY store or supermarket. You should choose a product which carries a Health & Safety Executive 'approval number'. Always follow the instructions carefully. Do not use bleach
- Dry-clean clothes affected by mildew and shampoo carpets

- After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould coming back. This paint is not effective if covered with ordinary paints or wallpaper
- Continue to take steps to reduce condensation in your home



Trouble paying for heating? Contact us for advice

We know that many people on low incomes struggle to pay their heating bills.

Our Money Matters advice service may be able to help you increase your income and save money on your heating costs. The service is free to all CHS customers.

Contact us for further details: please phone Customer Services on **0300 111 3555**, email us at moneyadvice@chsgroup.org.uk, or call in to our Histon office for further details.