



Keep Well this Winter

December 2009



www.kwtw.org.uk

Time to make a difference

For many, Christmas is an incredibly busy and sociable time but nearly 1.5m older people in the UK say they do not look forward to Christmas as they feel particularly lonely at this time of year.

Research reveals that nearly half a million older people leave their home only once a week or less and around 300,000 are effectively prisoners in their own homes as they need assistance to get out and about but do not have anyone to help them on a regular basis.

Factors such as high energy prices and rising living costs will also have a significant impact as older people who struggle financially are more likely to experience severe loneliness.

A spokesperson from Age Concern and Help the Aged said: "It's such a tragic state of affairs when older people tell us that that the only person they see from week to week is the postman."

"Isolation and loneliness are not inevitable side-effects of the ageing process, but the life events associated with older age can leave people vulnerable. Poverty, bereavement, far-flung families and failing health can all play a part, and while living alone is for some a preferred life choice, for others it can be one of the key risk factors leading to someone becoming isolated and also lonely, particularly for older people. "

"Once the clocks go back and the nights draw in, older people can feel even more cut off from society, but we know that something as simple as getting out of the house to meet and chat with other people can have a lasting effect."

A great gift for an older person this year could be the gift of your time. A visit, chat and a cup of tea could make a huge difference to someone near you this Christmas. Perhaps you could deliver a card by hand or offer some mince pies for an opportunity to visit.

We all like to feel valued and included during the festive season so why not make an older person feel special at this special time of year?

Happy Christmas.

Ros Williams, Health Initiatives Coordinator
Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales
Tel: 029 2043 1552; email: rosalyn.williams@accymru.org.uk

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Increase in excess winter deaths in 2008/2009

The number of 'excess winter deaths' in Wales jumped by approximately 67% last year, from 1440 in 2007/08 to 2500 in 2008/09.

The Office for National Statistics analysed the number of deaths between December and March and compared them to those which occur during the rest of the year.

Deaths during winter are higher than at other times of the year, with lower temperatures increasing the risk of hypothermia and diseases like flu thriving in the cold weather.

The winter of 2008/09 had the coldest winter temperature since 2005/06 and, according to the Health Protection Agency, flu activity started early last winter and more cases were recorded than in preceding winters.

Chief Executive of Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales, Robert Taylor, said: "The fact that the number of older people dying from winter related conditions in Wales has increased by almost a thousand is intolerable."

"There is a firm link between fuel-poverty, ill-health and death amongst our pensioners. Fuel prices have soared in recent years and many industry experts are predicting further rises for this winter which will force thousands of Welsh pensioners to choose between eating and heating again this winter."

"Government departments need to realise that older people are particularly affected by fuel price rises because they tend to live on low, fixed incomes and more

are housebound than other age groups and therefore need to keep their heating on for long periods. "

The charity recently urged the Assembly Government to address the spiralling crisis by:

- developing robust data to provide a full understanding of fuel poverty in Wales, including how it affects individual older people in terms of health/quality of life.
- producing a detailed action plan with clear targets and timescales for the eradication of fuel poverty.
- focusing their strategy on how fuel poverty affects the health of the nation and the subsequent impact on health services.
- resourcing a comprehensive range of support for fuel poor pensioners to ensure they get the help that they need.

The charity also urges older people in Wales to follow the advice offered by the Keep Well this Winter campaign to help keep them healthy throughout the winter.

KWTW forms a part of the wider 'Healthy Ageing' health promotion programme funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. This year KWTW is supporting a full days training at 12 venues around Wales for frontline agencies, staff and volunteers who are in contact with older people on a regular basis. The aim of the training is to enhance the knowledge and skills of those who participate so that they can identify those older people who might be living in fuel poverty; supporting them to access services that will enable them to maximise their income

and access financial help and support to improve the fuel efficiency of their home. The training is being delivered by National Energy Action (NEA) and will cover home energy efficiency, social tariffs, benefits and pensions.

Claim your benefits -

Thousands of pensioners in Wales are missing out on their share of up to £300 million in unclaimed benefits. If you are eligible this could make a huge difference to your weekly income.

Eat well and keep warm - Hot meals and drinks provide warmth and energy. Try to eat one nutritious hot meal every day and have a hot drink before bedtime. Wear several layers of clothes to keep warm and wrap up well when you go outside.

Stay active - Regular exercise generates heat and helps you to keep warm. It can be as simple as doing household chores or a stroll to the local shops.

Get a flu jab - If you're over 65 or have a long-term health condition, make sure you are protected by getting a free flu jab from your GP every year.

Shop around - Shopping around for the best energy rate could make you a considerable saving. Contact your energy supplier and check if you are eligible for a discounted tariff.

Get energy efficient -

Improving your insulation, could help keep your house warm and cut your bills. You may also be able to get a Home Energy Efficiency Scheme grant to help pay for heating improvements.

'Tis the season to be jolly

Many of us enjoy a drink, especially at Christmas. In moderation, drinking can be a pleasurable and sociable activity. However, when the festive season is in full swing it's easy to lose track of the amount we are actually drinking, particularly at home. Research suggests that alcohol consumption in the UK rises by around 41% during the Christmas period.

As we get older our tolerance to alcohol diminishes, so it's likely that drinking above recommended guidelines will have a greater effect than it would on a younger person. Older people are also more likely to be taking one or more prescribed medications, which can interact badly with alcohol in the body. Excessive alcohol consumption can increase the risk of falls and accidents, and worsen existing health problems. Drinking too much alcohol can also cause anxiety, confusion and depression.

Here are some tips to minimise the risk of problems with alcohol this Christmas:



Drinking too much alcohol can cause anxiety, confusion and depression and increase the risk of accidents.

- try to avoid episodes of heavy drinking
- dilute spirits and sip drinks slowly
- go for soft drinks sometimes, and remember it's OK to say no to an offer of an alcoholic drink
- avoid drinking on an empty stomach
- allow a couple of alcohol-free days per week
- never drink and drive.

By taking a responsible approach to drinking during the holiday period, we can all have fun this Christmas and stay safe and well.

This article was written by Alcohol Concern. You can contact our Wales office on 029 2066 0248, by e-mail at acwales@alcoholconcern.org.uk or write to us at Alcohol Concern Cymru, Sophia House, 28 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

Further advice about safe levels of drinking can be found on the Health Challenge Wales website, www.wales.gov.uk/healthchallenge

If you are worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call the Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline DAN 24/7 on 0800 6 33 55 88.

Their help is free and confidential help and their details will not appear on your itemised phone bill.



Alcohol Concern
Making Sense of Alcohol

How much is it safe to drink?

Alcohol is measured in units. One unit is the equivalent of a small (25ml) measure of spirits, while a pint or can of standard beer/lager is 2.3 units and a large (250ml) glass of wine is around three units.

The recommended guidelines are that men should not drink more than 3-4 units a day and no more than 21 units in a week, and women should drink no more than 2-3 units a day and no more than 14 units a week. However, given our vulnerability to alcohol as we age, it is wise to set a lower limit than this as we get older.

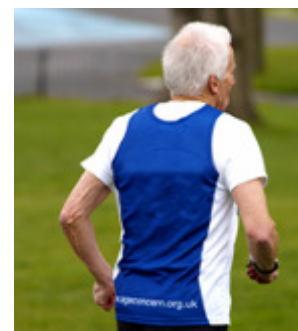
Further information about recommended guidelines can be found in the 'Know your units' information leaflet available from the Health Challenge Wales website.

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales also produce 'Drinking Wisely, Ageing Well', a useful leaflet written in conjunction with Alcohol Concern, which provides information on the risks of regular heavy drinking and can be downloaded from <http://www.accymru.org.uk/en/265/>

Shape up on a Shoestring

The Sports Council for Wales has launched its new campaign, *Shape up on a Shoestring*, to help slim down waistlines and bulk up wallets, in the midst of the recession. With a series of handy expert tips about low cost exercise options, motivational mantras and easy-to-swallow nutritional advice, it provides the ultimate guide to shedding lbs whilst saving pounds!

Read on to find out more about two incredible ladies who have changed their lives through exercise by keeping fit on a shoestring budget.



Olwen Davies, 66, is retired and lives in Tycroes, Ammanford

Although retired now for six years, Olwen Davies has never been busier and has lost a stone in weight over the last year thanks to an active lifestyle.

She explains, “I have made an effort to keep active over the last couple of years because I lost my husband around that time and felt that I needed to get out and about more and keep my mind occupied. I have lost a stone in weight over the last year by walking and swimming, and only recently started attending ballroom dancing lessons at the local community hall.”

Olwen swims once a week and goes walking every day with her dog, Benny, from anything between 1-3 miles.

She adds, “I started going to the walk and swim group for the over 50s about a year ago and its free through Carmarthenshire County Council. It helps a great deal because the cost of certain activities can put you off at times.”

As well as keeping fit, Olwen keeps herself active in the local community:

“By keeping myself busy, I have made new friends and generally socialise more. I have been fortunate because I’ve been relatively healthy all my life and know the importance of keeping a balanced lifestyle. My four grandchildren also keep me on my toes!”

Marion Jones, 66, is retired and lives in Swansea with her partner

Marion was recently diagnosed with breast cancer but has made a rapid recovery thanks to walking once, if not twice, a week with her local walking club.

She explains, “I was quite shocked when I heard the news. I went through a cycle of radiotherapy and started walking with the club again in March 2009.”

The grandmother-of-three joined Mawr Walking Club five years ago when the club first formed and found the walking to be of great benefit, especially the shorter walks.

She adds, “We started doing long walks with the club, but then we started organising shorter walks, which have proved very popular, especially with those people who are recovering from an illness or operation.

“I think that walking helped me greatly in overcoming the treatment, along with a positive attitude and an optimistic state of mind. I also suffer with asthma and so I’ve always been aware of the importance of keeping relatively fit and healthy.”

“I always said that I would start walking properly once I retired and now I think it’s one of the best things I have ever done. As well as making new friends, I get a chance to keep in touch with a lot of people whilst keeping fit at the same time.”

For more information about Shape-up on a Shoestring, visit the campaign’s Facebook pages at www.facebook.com/shape.up.on.a.shoestring where you’ll find tips, training videos, recipes, quizzes and more. You can also interact with other ‘shoestring shapers’ looking to share their tips and experiences.

Stan's on hand for older people this winter

A mum and daughter team have roped in veteran South Wales entertainer Stan Stennett to help older people keep warm this winter.

Alex Gdula, who works at the Pentwyn Leisure Centre, and her mum Gloria Yates MBE, of Age Concern Cardiff and the Vale's Healthy, Wealthy and Wise project, joined forces to host the event for the over 50s.

They aimed to provide information and support on getting through the cold months with a Keep Well This Winter event.

Ms Gdula said they want to let people know what's out there for them in terms of everything to do with their health, fitness and wellbeing.

She added: "We just want to raise awareness. There were

lots of stalls, from community alliance to the pension service, the Red Cross, food standards agency and Cardiff Bus.

"There was also a chance to find out more about what we offer at the centre, like free swimming for over 60s.

"We were delighted to host the event at Pentwyn Leisure Centre as we all know the benefits of keeping fit far outweigh anything else. Healthy body, healthy mind."

Mrs Yates, 74, said there are three main elements to the event.

"These elements are how to keep warm, how to keep well, and how to keep safe, and these elements are the things we provided information and support on", added the mother-of-six from Ely, Cardiff.

"There was also a free goodie bag for the first 200 people."

Opening the event, was local entertainer Stan Stennett. The 82-year-old from Cardiff said he enjoyed meeting people in his age group and doing some exercises with them.

He added: "People like me need to think carefully about the three elements focused on at the event.

"They need to keep safe and think about where they're going and how they're getting there, they must keep warm during the cold winter months and it's very important to keep fit.

"Even if it's just raising your eyelids up and down – there's lots of little things you can do. Try to think back a few years and remember what you did then, every little helps."

Bill star fronts burglary warning

A campaign to protect older people in England and Wales from distraction burglars has been launched by former star of The Bill, Graham Cole, who led a role play class on dealing with scammers disguised as utility workers.

With some 9,000 cases of burglars coming their way into homes each year, Mr. Cole said the best advice was "If in doubt, keep them out."

The role play session was part of a six-month campaign to provide advice and practical support to groups especially vulnerable to distraction burglary, giving them the confidence to deal with bogus callers.

The campaign has provided grants of £1,500 to several Age Concern Organisations in Wales to deliver this information and advice through community-based road shows which will begin in the new year.

According to the campaign, the best ways of guarding against distraction burglaries are keeping doors locked and using a door chain, checking identification properly and signing up for a free personal password from utilities suppliers.

Andrew Harrop, Head of Public Policy for Age Concern and Help the Aged said distraction burglars were guilty of a 'heartless crime'.

He added: "Distraction burglars are calculating thieves and can be very convincing, so it is important to take simple security precautions before letting a stranger into their home.

To obtain a free pack, or to find out more about road shows in your area, call free on 0800 456 1213 or contact your local Age Concern.

3.6m missing out on energy savings

A new report by the Home Heat Helpline suggests that as many as 3.6m people in the UK are missing out on savings on their energy bills because they are not claiming insulation grants.

Four of the top five areas that are taking least advantage of the grants are in Wales and in some areas, a quarter of all households are not claiming insulation benefits they are entitled to.

According to the report, households could save more than £250 a year by installing loft and cavity wall insulation.

The grants are provided by energy suppliers under the Carbon Emission Reduction Target scheme which provides grants to improve energy efficiency in poorly insulated homes and anyone aged over 70 can apply.

“This research shows the huge scale of unclaimed help that’s

Top ten areas missing out on energy savings:

1. Blaenau Gwent (26% of homes)
2. Merthyr Tydfil (26%)
3. Neath Port Talbot (24%)
4. Caerphilly (24%)
5. Knowsley (24%)
6. Rhondda Cynon Taff (23%)
7. Torbay (22%)
8. Sandwell (22%)
9. Liverpool (22%)
10. Leicester (22%)

out there on offer from energy suppliers,” said a Home Heat Helpline spokeswoman.

“We have trained advisors who can help people to obtain grants for insulation, provide information on special reduced tariffs and provide advice and support on how to keep warm and save money on energy bills.”

Utilities policy officer at the Citizens Advice Bureau, Tony Herbert, said there had been an increase in fuel poverty and that

it is vital for households to take advantage of the help available.

“With the recession continuing and fuel prices remaining at historically high levels, it is essential that people who are struggling with fuel bills take advantage of the help that is available before the cold weather kicks in,” he said.

“The Home Heat Helpline is free and contacting them could make all the difference in helping you have a warmer winter.”

For more information about insulation grants and energy efficiency, contact the Home Heat Helpline on 0800 33 66 99 or visit www.homeheathelpline.org.uk.

The ‘Little book of energy’, a useful booklet with advice on saving energy and reducing bills is also available for download at www.kwtw.org.uk, together with other energy saving tips.

Affordable Warmth Casework Service launch

Care & Repair Cardiff in partnership with Taff Housing Association and Cardiff Community Housing Association are pleased to announce the launch of a new Affordable Warmth Casework Service which aims to help older people in Cardiff who may be struggling with high fuel bills or are finding their homes cold and hard to heat.

The Affordable Warmth Casework Service will visit older tenants and home owners in their own homes. At this visit, the Caseworker will provide advice, assistance and support to help the householder with a number of key issues. These will include advice on the energy efficiency of the property, using energy more efficiently as well as ensuring that people are paying for their energy in the most cost effective way. A benefit check will also be provided to ensure that people are claiming all the benefits they are entitled to, which may lead to extra money in their pockets to help cover the cost of fuel bills.

The Caseworker will review with the person what is wanted and needed to have an affordably warm home and will then put together a package of support to make it happen. This is flexible, so that if a person does not agree with anything suggested, or if their needs change, the service to them will change as well.

For further information regarding the Affordable Warmth Casework Service or to arrange an appointment to meet with the Affordable Warmth Caseworker, please contact Beatrice Roberts at Care & Repair Cardiff on 02920 473337 or email careandrepair@ccha.org.uk.

Top fire safety tips for older people

With dark evenings and colder weather, there is an increased risk of a fire occurring. Sadly, the majority of fire deaths in the home involve older people with factors such as reduced mobility making it harder to escape from a fire.

To help older people stay safe from fire during the winter, the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service have provided these top fire safety tips:

1. Fit and maintain a smoke alarm – you should have one on each level of your home. The ideal position is on the ceiling, in the middle of a room, or on the hallway or landing. Do not put alarms in or near kitchens or bathrooms where smoke or steam can set them off by accident.
2. Test it weekly. A working smoke alarm can give you valuable time to get out, stay out and dial 999.
3. Do not remove the batteries. If your smoke alarm keeps going off accidentally while you are cooking, do not remove the batteries. Instead move the alarm or change it for one with a silencer button.
4. Stay safe in the kitchen. This is the area where the majority of house fires start so never leave cooking unattended. If you need to leave the kitchen turn electrical appliances off and take pans off the heat.



Your local fire and rescue team can arrange a free home fire safety check.

5. In the event of a fire 'Get out, stay out and call 999!' Do not delay for valuables, do not investigate or try to tackle the fire. Use a mobile, a neighbour's phone or a phone box to call 999. If someone needs to be rescued wait safely outside for the firefighters who have the equipment and training to do it. Never go back in.
6. Do not overload plug sockets. One plug per socket is the rule, be careful not to let leads trail over cookers or touch water.
7. Get 'key clever'. Keys for windows and doors should be in an accessible place where everyone can find them, so you can get out quickly in the event of a fire.
8. Plan your escape route. Make sure you and your family know the quickest way out in the event of fire. Consider an alternative route in case your usual one is blocked.

9. Keep candles in secure holders, on a surface that does not burn, and away from any materials that could burn, such as curtains.

10. Make sure that electric blankets are turned off and stored flat (not rolled up) when not in use. Never use them with a hot water bottle. Statistics show that fires caused by electrical appliances and electric blankets have the highest rate of injury, with 440 injuries for every 1,000 fires.

For a free home fire safety check and free smoke alarms with your local fire and rescue service, call free now on: 0800 169 1234

Firebrake Wales also produce a useful leaflet entitled 'Fire Safety in the Home' which can be downloaded from www.kwtw.org.uk.



Diary dates for coming months

Over the next few months Keep Well this Winter events and activities will be taking place throughout Wales to provide older people with help and advice to keep them healthy during the winter period.

If you are running an event that you'd like us to list in the newsletter and on the Keep Well this Winter Website, please contact Ros Williams on 029 2043 1552 or email rosalyn.williams@accymru.org.uk.

Real life stories request

The key aims of the Keep Well this Winter campaign include improving the health and quality of life of older people in Wales. Real-life examples of this can motivate those involved with promoting the campaign by showing what difference has been made to older people. Also, access to a human interest story can be the difference between the media giving press attention to the campaign and highlighting campaign messages, or rejecting the story.

If you know of any real-life stories of how the campaign has helped an older person and could share the story either anonymised or with the older person's consent and identity revealed, then please contact Ros Williams on 029 2043 1552.

January newsletter

It is important that everyone is aware of KWTW activities that are coming up as well as successful events or initiatives that have already taken place. Please forward up-coming dates, articles, photos and ideas to: Ros Williams - Tel: 029 2043 1552; Fax: 029 2047 1418; email: rosalyn.williams@accymru.org.uk

The deadline for the next newsletter is Friday 18 December 2009.

The Editor reserves the right to alter submitted articles.

Keep Well this Winter contact information:

**Rosalyn Williams - Health Initiatives Coordinator,
Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales:**

Tel: 029 2043 1552

Email: rosalyn.williams@accymru.org.uk

Richard Jones - Healthy Ageing Assistant, Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales:

Tel: 029 2043 1553

Email: richard.jones@accymru.org.uk

Useful websites:

Keep Well this Winter - www.kwtw.org.uk

Welsh Assembly Government - www.wales.gov.uk

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales - www.agecymru.org.uk



HELP THE AGED WE WILL

**Help the Aged yng Nghymru
Help the Aged in Wales**

Keep Well this Winter is coordinated by Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales, a new charity dedicated to improving the lives of older people.

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales
Tŷ John Pathy
13/14 Neptune Court
Vanguard Way
Cardiff
CF24 5PJ

Tel: 029 2043 1555
Fax: 029 2047 1418
Registered Charity 1128436