

How to prevent damp causing damage to your property

Damp is responsible for all sorts of damage and is particularly prevalent in the cold winter months. It can affect your health as well as your property, but it is largely preventable. Here are our top tips to take care of your property and avoid or minimise the risk from damp.

As well as affecting the appearance of a building, damp can also cause deterioration to the condition of plaster and brickwork, and cause timber to decay. It can also affect your belongings and create an unhealthy living environment. A damp home can feel cold, unwelcoming and uncomfortable.

What causes damp?

Damp is the result of excess moisture, which can be caused by a variety of sources. Rising damp, roof or window damage and leaking pipes can all be contributory factors. Here are the main types of damp:

1. Condensation

The most common cause in people's homes is through insufficient ventilation, where excess moisture cannot escape the building. This usually results in condensation, which arises when the air cannot contain any more moisture than it already does. Everyday activities such as drying clothes indoors, cooking, showering, washing and even breathing, all cause moisture. If it's not allowed to escape naturally, the moisture will cause condensation to form.

2. Penetrating damp

If your roof or gutters leak, or other external parts of your property are not sufficiently weather-proofed, damp may penetrate into your building. You'll usually notice this when you spot a damp patch on the ceiling or in the corner of a room that has an external wall.

3. Rising damp

This occurs if brick walls absorb moisture from below and it penetrates up into walls and floors above. It usually affects older properties (pre- early 20th century), as most modern properties have damp-proofing built into their foundations. You may have rising damp if you notice cold, damp surfaces and mould in your ground-floor rooms. There may also be a musty smell.

4. Leaking plumbing

A cracked or burst pipe can cause untold damage to your property. Sometimes the leak may be so small that you're unaware of it until you notice damp patches, stains or mould on walls, ceilings or near radiators or underfloor heating pipes. [Read our earlier blog for tips on preventing or dealing with burst pipes.](#)

Health issues caused by damp

If damp is not treated in your property, it can lead to various health problems. Respiratory problems, infections and allergies are the most likely result of living in a damp environment. In more severe cases, the immune system can be affected. Babies, young children and older people, as well as those with asthma and other respiratory conditions, are most at risk, so it is especially important to minimise the risks and exposure to damp and mouldy environments for these people.

Prevention is better than cure

Of course, it's always better to prevent damp from becoming a problem in the first place. Here are our tips:

1. Keep the outside of your property in good order

- Check your property regularly and consistently, especially after a storm or bad weather
- Make sure your roof tiles are secure and not letting in any rain or snow
- Examine the brickwork for cracks or dilapidation
- Clear your gutters regularly and check for damage. You could ask your window cleaner, handyman or a gutter specialist to keep them clear for you.

2. Ventilate your property

- Provide an escape route for excess moisture by opening windows for at least 10-15 minutes a day, particularly after a steamy bath or shower or when cooking anything that generates a lot of steam.
- If you have trickle vents on your windows, make sure these are left in the open position.
- Install an extractor fan in rooms that don't have windows – this is particularly important for bathrooms and kitchens where excess moisture is frequently generated
- Allow air to circulate around your home – leave internal doors open where possible
- Avoid cleaning windows or floors on cold or wet days – the surfaces will take longer to dry and cause more moisture
- Use moisture absorbers in small spaces, such as under-stairs cupboards
- If your windows regularly have condensation on them, wipe the water off each morning and wring the cloth out (rather than hanging it up to dry)
- Ensure your furniture is not touching external walls, and fit curtains or blinds outside window recesses so that the fabric is situated several inches away from the windows themselves. This will reduce condensation, allow air to circulate and avoid the occurrence of mould on the furniture
- Use moisture-resistant paint and wipe-clean wallpaper, especially on surfaces that you know are prone to damp.

Washing

- Drying laundry is one of the biggest causes of condensation, after bathroom and kitchen activity. When possible, hang your washing outside. It will dry outside fairly quickly even when it is cold
- If you have no option other than to dry washing indoors, consider investing in a dehumidifier with a laundry setting, or use a heated ailer. If you have a tumble dryer make sure it is properly vented to the outside of the property.

Cooking

- Put lids on your saucepans to keep excess moisture in the pans
- Use the cooker hood or an extractor fan while cooking and for a short while afterwards. This will remove excess moisture from the air
- Open a window while cooking.

3. Insulation and heating

- Ensure your property has adequate insulation and well-fitted double glazing. The initial investment will pay for itself over time because your bills will be lower.
- Set your thermostat to a low temperature but have it on for longer. This will help to keep a continual temperature and avoid condensation. Have thermostats for each room, or areas of the house, and thermostatic valves on the radiators, so that you can adjust the heating as needed. This will make your energy use much more efficient and cost-effective.

If damp strikes

If you notice mould or other signs of damp in your property, it is important to investigate and address the cause as quickly as possible. Not all damage caused by mould or damp is covered by insurance. Sarrani can help to identify the problem, and if it's an issue that can be claimed through your buildings or contents insurance, we can help to progress the claim and deal with the associated repairs.

We are paid by your insurer, meaning that there are no additional costs to you for our help in project managing the insurance work. All work carried out under our supervision comes with a 1-year guarantee. Full details are contained in our terms and conditions, available on request.

For more information on how we can help, email us at info@sarrani.com or call us on 020 3006 3126.