



equinox

MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND EXTREME COLD WEATHER

Our climate is changing. In the UK, this means we are seeing more frequent bouts of severe weather.

Extreme cold weather is an average temperature of 2°C or less and/or ice and heavy snow. It can be unpredictable and severely affect your life.

If you experience mental ill health, you need to take extra care of your health and wellbeing in extreme cold weather.

One way to adapt to climate change is to know how to look after yourself and others in the cold. Read our tips inside then identify your needs, such as adaptations to your home or routine, useful phone numbers and local support services.



Your health comes first

- Stay indoors whenever possible. Extreme cold weather can make symptoms of mental ill health worse, such as mood and energy levels.
- Always contact your doctor if you feel mentally or physically unwell. Exposure to extreme cold can cause hypothermia and medication can affect your body temperature and how you perceive it. Symptoms of hypothermia include slurred or slow speech, tiredness, memory loss, shaking, numbness, changes to breathing, heart rate or blood pressure.
- Ensure you have adequate supplies of medication if extreme cold weather is forecast. If unpredictable extreme cold weather results in you being short of medication, speak to your support worker or doctor straight away.
- Extreme cold weather can increase the risk of forgetting to take medication. A pill box can help to remember each dose; these are available from chemists.
- Check storage conditions for prescribed medication – many advise to avoid damp, very cold places.
- If extreme cold stops you going to recovery groups, call peers for support.
- If you cannot avoid going outdoors, watch out for ice, snow and wet surfaces – accidents are more likely in extreme cold, particularly if you are experiencing mental ill health or side effects of medication.



Food and drink

- Stock up with long life food that is easy to make – dried / tinned food and frozen ready meals.
- Drink hot non-alcoholic fluids regularly, such as tea and soup.
- Make and consume food and non-alcoholic fluids at the best times for you – it's better to eat and drink when it suits you than not all.



Money matters

- Keep an emergency fund for unpredictable cold weather.
- If you receive benefits, find out about cold weather payments
- Prioritise funds in extreme cold to pay for food, non-alcoholic drinks, clothes, electricity, gas and phone.



Dress for warmth

- Layer clothing. Wear upper body layers with long sleeves. Wear tights / long johns under trousers. Double up socks.
- If you cannot avoid going outdoors, wear a waterproof top layer. Wear a hat, gloves, scarf and footwear with grip. If you get wet, change or dry yourself as soon as possible.



Keep warm indoors

- After washing in the morning, dry off completely in the bathroom and get dressed in the warmth.
- Use blankets and central heating to keep warm indoors.
- Block drafts from windows, doors and letterbox.

- If you are experiencing mental ill health or side effects of medication:
- Take care using fan or gas heaters
 - Fill hot water bottles from the hot tap NOT the kettle
 - DO NOT take very hot baths or showers



If you are homeless

- DO NOT sleep out in extreme cold.
- Ask your outreach worker about shelters and food banks.
- If you are experiencing mental ill health or side effects of medication, avoid being outdoors in extreme cold weather.



Keep in touch and informed

- Isolating in extreme cold can make symptoms of mental ill health worse. Keep in daily contact with friends, family and support workers.
- Turn on the TV or radio to find out weather reports.
- Look out for people who are vulnerable. Can you think of anyone who may need a supportive phone call or message?
- Find out about help to keep warm and well from community / faith groups.



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To keep yourself safe and well in extreme weather, check out the full series of advice leaflets from Equinox:

- Alcohol and extreme cold weather
- Drugs and extreme cold weather
- Mental ill health and extreme cold weather
- Alcohol and extreme hot weather
- Drugs and extreme hot weather
- Mental ill health and extreme hot weather

**To download and share electronic copies,
please visit: www.equinoxcare.org.uk/climate-change**

These guides have been developed by Equinox with funding from Defra. The content is based on the experiences of Equinox service users with expert guidance from Equinox medical professionals.