HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR HOME

SAVE TIME AND MONEY WITH THIS EASY HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST FROM HANDYCROWD.COM

The earlier you spot potential home maintenance problems the quicker, easier, and cheaper it will be to fix them, protecting your most valuable asset. Get started today in a few minutes by reading what to check and what to do.

AREA	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	WHAT TO DO
OUTDOORS		
HARD STANDING AREAS **TIP**: Go and check during heavy rain or immediately after it stops, before water has a chance to soak in or away.	Check that all water *runs away* and doesn't soak in or form puddles close to buildings or walls. Look for any sunken paved or other areas where water pools after rain. Investigate possible causes of erosion from underneath, such as settlement, rainwater, leaking drains, wheel ruts, ants etc. Repair or rectify causes before fixing the damage.	Consider reconfiguring any hard standing areas ensuring they slope away (called *fall*) towards drains or garden areas. Lift up or cut out the sunken areas. Add more substrate (sand/mortar/stone/soil/etc) and carefully level out. Replace surface material, tamping down and levelling up with the surrounding area using a timber straight edge or spirit level. Finish off joints if applicable.
DRAINS **TIP:** Oils and grease solidify in cold drains causing blockages. Never put oil or grease into the kitchen sink. When cool, pour old oil into empty milk containers and mop up grease with kitchen paper. **TIP:** Put an old waterproof jacket on and tape the tops of rubber gloves to the jacket if you're going 'drain diving'... **TIP:** When using drain rods to clear blockages, go gently and always be turning the rods clockwise as you push them in and draw them out. Then you won't 'lose' any because they came 'unscrewed'. Oh, and you might want to stock up on the rubber gloves... **TIP:** Work downstream of the blocked pipe. i.e. open up each IC until you get to the one that's NOT full of water. Rod 'upstream'	Check grills or grates for leaves and other debris. Check underneath the grate as well because some always goes through, plus debris accumulates from stuff washed into sinks etc.	Put your rubber gloves on and clear away anything sitting on top of grills/grates. Then lift out the grill/grate and scoop out anything sitting in the water trap, especially the one that takes water from the kitchen sink, and yes it will be very, very yucky...  (See tip...)
	Check that covers on any inspection chambers (IC) you have are free by removing them. Check the chambers underneath are clean and free from detritus. If there's a really bad smell or you can see water/nasty stuff sitting in the half pipe in the bottom, you might have a blockage somewhere. Believe it or not, drains shouldn't smell too bad if they are working properly. Note: It's possible that access to your drains via an IC is on a neighbour's property. You have the right to access them, but of course, it's polite to ask first (work together, it's probably their drain too...) Consider hiring a drain camera to inspect the internal condition of your drains properly.	Scrape around the edges of the cover with an old knife or trowel. Remove any screws. If there are 'key' holes, go and buy a cheap set of drain keys, insert, turn 90 degrees and heave. Otherwise, using a couple of prying implements (small pry bars, old flat screwdrivers etc), gently work around the edge and lever the cover up. If really stuck, try tapping with a rubber mallet as well as getting progressively more aggressive with your levering. Never use a metal hammer, because covers are brittle and easily broken. Brush, hosepipe or gently pressure wash away any build-up of crud inside the IC. If the IC is full of water, then a pipe is blocked 'downstream'. Clear pipe blockages using a cheap set of 'drain rods' (see tip). Be warned, it's not the nicest job in the world... Scrape out/wire brush rusty IC frame grooves and the edges of the cover. Put grease in the frame groove to help next time.
	Look closely at the ground along any drain runs, (grates to IC's for example) because when drains leak, material surrounding the pipe washes away down the drains. This erosion eventually causes depressions in the ground or settlement under walls and hard standing areas etc. This settlement or	You can get an idea of drain depth and direction by looking into adjacent IC's and drawing lines between them to indicate possible drain runs. You can also hire a drain locator to find hidden drains. Dig down and find the pipe (this is the hardest part). Excavate around and underneath the pipe exposing the leaking section. Cut out leaking/ broken section, insert

towards the full IC. Once you feel the blockage clear, you'll hear the rumble of water coming from 'upstream', hint: time to bug out!	movement is what causes hard standing areas to crack or break up. Leaking drains can also attract tree and plant roots because of the nutrient rich water. Eventually the roots will block or damage the pipe.	a section of new pipe and slip collars or rubber pipe connectors. Surround the repaired pipe with pea gravel or soft 'as dug' material. Backfill hole to the top, compacting as you go, leaving it a little high to allow the 'backfill' to settle.
MAIN STRUCTURE **TIP:** Consider replacing hard paved areas at the base of walls with small 'borders' of small stones or even soil, to lessen splash back when it rains, even as little as 15cm (6") wide will help and 30cm (12") is even better. **TIP:** Monitor any cracks in brickwork or mortar joints to determine if movement is still 'live' and ongoing or old and stable. Buy and fix 'tell tales' across serious cracks to measure movement. Also mark the ends of a crack (with the date) to see if it travels further over time. **TIP:** Occasionally, bricks spall because they are too soft for the location. Bricks below DPC level, in chimneys and in garden walls need to be tough! Masonry painted with non-breathable paint can also suffer from spalling because of trapped moisture. **TIP:** Damp down masonry with a garden sprayer and allow to soak in a little. Pack the new mortar joints around new bricks tightly with fairly stiff mortar, especially the top joint. Push and pack the mortar in with a finger trowel or a thin piece of wood. Full joints	**MASONRY/WALLS/BRICK/BLOCK/ETC** Check that any masonry around the base of your house is as dry as possible. Investigate areas that look different from the majority of the wall (damp, salts, spalling bricks etc) Excess moisture evaporating from the surface eventually spalls bricks, usually around the base of walls in exposed locations or damp areas. Often exacerbated by freeze/thaw cycles and/or cement mortar re-pointing on older properties. Find out how excess moisture is getting into the wall. A dry wall is a happy wall.	To minimise moisture getting into walls: - Repair leaking gutters or downpipes. - Correct poor falls or levels on paving. - Repair failed damp-proof courses (DPC). - Repair poor copings, cappings or 'drips'. - Repair leaking roofs etc. Replace spalled bricks by chopping out the mortar around them using a plugging chisel and/or an SDS drill. Carefully remove spalled bricks, turn them around and replace using a suitable mortar or source some additional matching bricks. See 'hard standing' areas above, ensuring that water runs or falls away from walls. See also anti splash back tip, to lessen water splashing up onto your masonry.
	Look for white salty deposits (efflorescence) on the surface of the bricks, usually on the first metre (3') or thereabouts above ground level. Efflorescence is mineral deposits in the form of soluble salts left behind when excess water evaporates from a wall. Efflorescence itself is not a problem, but the excess moisture could cause damage over time.	First, investigate how excess moisture is getting into the wall and remedy (check gutters, downpipes, paving, DPC etc). On a warm dry day, brush the salt away with a brush. Gentle and minimal use of water or a pressure washer can be effective, (be careful not to saturate the wall though because water in the wall is the problem don't forget). Special chemicals are also available but be careful to follow the instructions given.
	Check that any airbricks are free from obstruction.	Pull out previous attempts to block airbricks to prevent 'draughts'. Brush, vacuum or blow out debris and cobwebs etc.
	Look for cracked bricks and especially vertical cracks running through several bricks (shear cracks). Cracked bricks are serious and if there are several, further investigation is required to find out what is stressing the wall before carrying out repairs. It's possible there is foundation movement, leaking drains, tree roots etc. Consider calling in a structural engineer to get their thoughts and a report for your insurance company.	Rectify causes of live movement and allow to settle for a period before attempting to repair cracks. This might take up to a full year. Once cracks are stable, remove the mortar surrounding the damaged bricks using a plugging chisel and/or an SDS drill. Carefully chop out the broken bricks and replace with matching bricks and mortar. Use 'ready to use' lime mortar from a specialist or mix lime and sieved/graded sharp sand mixed 1:3 for older properties. A typical modern mortar mix might be cement, lime and soft sand mixed to a ratio of 1:1:6 +plasticiser.
	Look for cracks that zigzag down the mortar joints.	Chase out cracks or vulnerable eroded mortar joints to appx. twice their height and re-point using a suitable, matching mortar.

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are important to maintain the walls strength. Pack the joint from right to left (or left to right) to avoid pushing the mortar all the way through and off the back of the brick in single leaf masonry. Once the mortar joint is full, tool off the front to match the surrounding brickwork. At the end of the day, gently brush the repaired areas with a soft hand brush for that extra professional finish.	Look also for seriously eroded mortar joints, i.e. more than the joint width. Shallow erosion isn't too much to worry about if there are no cracks or damp issues internally.	Use ready to use lime mortar from a specialist or mix lime and sieved/graded sharp sand mixed 1:3 for older properties. A typical modern mortar mix might be cement, lime and soft sand mixed to a ratio of 1:1:6 +plasticiser.
	VEGETATION Check plants close to walls. Look for any unintentional vegetation growing up or into walls.	Annually cut any climbing plants to leave at least 30cm free space from any window, door or roofline. Remove unintentional plants completely.
	RENDERED AND PAINTED FINISHES Check cement rendered or painted areas for good adhesion to the wall beneath by tapping gently with your knuckles or a short stick. Hollow areas sound and feel different to the well-attached areas.	Investigate what's causing the failure, usually excess moisture is getting behind the surface. Subsequent freezing 'blows' the render or paint away from the wall. Fix the moisture problem, then cut/scrape/remove loose or flaking areas back to sound edges and replace/refinish with a matching, suitable mortar or breathable paint.
DOORS AND WINDOWS **TIP:** Don't use silicone sealants on painted frames because it cannot be over-painted. Use a paintable caulk or mastic. **TIP:** Carry out repairs in warm weather, especially if using putty on old windows. **TIP:** Remove and replace any broken glass before water ingress has a chance to rot the thin glazing bars or frame.	Check paintwork to ensure the finish is still bright and intact. Especially look for flaking, splits, dullness or other damage.	Any dull paint needs thorough preparation and re-finishing. Flaking paints needs complete removal, priming and re-finishing.
	On timber frames, check for soft spots using your thumb. Especially at the bottom of the uprights or in the window cill itself.	Remove any glazing adjacent to bad areas. Cut out rotten wood and replace with good quality timber, glued and screwed into place. Apply a primer preservative to repairs and re-finish. Re-fit glazing.
	Check for leaking panes caused by missing putty or broken glass in old windows.	Remove broken glass and scrape out old putty. Paint the rebate with a good primer. Push new glass into a small bead of fresh, well-kneaded putty on the inside. Putty the outside and smooth over with a clean knife. Re-paint once putty has formed a firm skin.
	Check that plastic window frames are clean, especially from dust, grit or bird droppings etc. Check seals and weather stripping for gaps and splits.	Wash down plastic frames using regular household cleaners and wipe dry. Wipe clean all weather seals. Replace damaged or missing seals or rubber strips.
	Check all sealant or caulk around frames for integrity. Look for missing or split sealant.	Scrape away damaged sealant with a scraper, being careful not to damage the frame etc. Clean down and re-apply sealant or caulk.
ROOFLINE **TIP:** Leaning ladders onto rainwater gutters is dangerous, period. Secure your ladder by getting someone to stand on the bottom rung	**GUTTERS AND DOWNPIPES** Check the rainwater system works properly and yes, the best way to do it is when it's absolutely pouring down with rain...  Check that the rainwater is actually going into the gutter and not behind or over the front. Water 'cascading' over the front, rear or end	Clean any build-up of detritus out of the gutters with a brush, trowel and bucket at least annually. After all the leaves have fallen in the autumn or fall is a good time. Check gutters are level or fall slightly towards outlets; remove and lift up if not. If downpipes are blocked, either flush with a running hosepipe from the top or work up from the bottom.

or if working alone, place a heavy bag of sand against the legs and another over the first rung. **LIFESAVING TIP:** Screw some simple to install, permanent eyebolt anchors into the wall/ fascia of your house at common access points and tie your ladder to them. These anchors would be virtually invisible from the ground, but they'd give you a super secure ladder. Plus they could save your life.	of gutters usually means a blockage at the outlet/downpipe or a poor fall. Especially check downpipes for leaks and security. Check also that the water goes into the drain from the downpipe shoe.	Repair any leaking joints with new rubber seals or silicone sealant after a thorough clean. Dismantle parts that continually come apart, clean and re-assemble with silicone sealant, which is a fair adhesive.
	FASCIA, SOFFITS AND BARGE BOARDS Check condition of external woodwork such as fascia's, soffits, bargeboards and other external wooden trims for rot, flaking paint or dull finishes.	Cut out any rotten sections and let in new timber. Prime new timber all round plus the cut ends of the existing timber before fixing the new timber into place. Scrape away any loose finishes, sand and re-finish as necessary.
	Check condition of any vents or grills looking for obstruction. Check that any insect screens behind vents are intact. Check condition of any bird screening, often found under the first row of profiled roofing tiles.	Brush, vacuum or blow out debris and cobwebs etc. Spiders love building cobwebs in vents, so get a 'big boy' to help if you're a little bit scared... Wire, cable tie or screw matching mesh over any tears or holes you find.
	VERGES Check the verge (edges of roof) for damage, missing mortar etc, which can allow rain (and birds!) in.	Scrape out loose mortar, brush out and damp down with a garden sprayer. Re-point using a strong, stiff mortar. Mix mortar 1:3 cement to building sand (strong mix).
ROOF **TIP:** To examine your roof and chimney etc. closely, use a pair of binoculars or a telescope and let the neighbours wonder.... **TIP:** To hold replacement slates with overlapped or hidden nails, first nail a copper strip to the lath. Slide up the slate, wiggling it fully up into line with the rest of the row and fold up the copper strip to hold it. **TIP:** Always carry out an extra roof inspection after a big storm. Better to find any damage before the next one... **TIP**: Solid ridge tiles are probably best left in place as trying to remove	**ROOF COVERINGS.** Check the roof for any missing, slipped or broken tiles, slates etc. Look especially around the bottom, sides and top of the roof, as these are common problem areas.	Replace tiles by pushing up the row above a little if possible. Wiggle out any broken pieces and pop the new one in. Pull down the row above. A trowel and pairs of door or wooden wedges are useful to hold up tiles slightly, especially if the surrounding tiles are nailed in place. Gloves are good.
	Check other special roof coverings you might have, from the bituminous felt on a garden shed to plastic sheets on conservatories or summerhouses. Look for evidence of leaks, damage, splits or holes.	Repair any damage you find after sourcing repair information from the products manufacturer. Make temporary repairs by covering up damage using sealants, patches, repair bandage etc.
	Visually check ridge tiles on the rooftop for eroded or missing mortar likely to affect security. Physically check any you suspect are loose. Loose ridge tiles commonly blow off during storms..... and remember where do you park your car.....	Lift away loose ridge tiles. Scrape away any loose mortar and brush down. Damp down with a garden sprayer and allow to soak in. Using a fairly stiff mortar, re-bed the removed ridge tiles and replace any missing mortar on the others. Trowel the mortar up to the bottom of the ridge tile following the roof profile in a smooth action pressing the mortar in firmly.
	Similarly check hip tiles running down the roof for eroded mortar and security. Hip tiles also commonly blow off during storms.	As above for ridge tiles. Access is usually difficult to achieve safely. Scaffolding is the only properly safe way.

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them can break several tiles. Re-bed the ones that lift off easily and repoint the ones that are solid to keep a uniform look. **TIP:** Mortar for bedding ridge tiles needs to be strong to withstand the weather. Try 1:3 cement to soft building sand mixed to a stiff consistency (not sloppy like bricklaying mortar). **TIP:** The best time to fix your roof is when the sun is shining.... **TIP:** Paintwork on above roof structures (dormers etc) are often overlooked, which is a problem because their exposed location means they actually need more attention than other areas of the house. **NOTE:** The chimney is the toughest place to be on your house as it's exposed to wind, rain, cold, heat and chemicals from smoke and water. Chimneys can deteriorate to a point where it's difficult to believe they are still standing, let alone able to withstand a storm. Once the top bricks start to break up, don't mess about, erect a proper scaffold, take down the stack brick by brick until you get to solid brickwork and then rebuild it. Gaining access to chimneys is difficult and expensive but *never* attempt work on a chimney without a proper scaffolding. Don't work on a chimney from a ladder...ever. Seriously, I really mean it!	Check the condition of any flat roofed areas for signs of the covering lifting. Walk around all areas feeling for soft or spongy boards underneath your feet. Check all up-stands or flashings where the roof joins other roofs or walls, for integrity. Check the condition of protective UV coverings, such as small stones or reflective paints etc.	Repairs are often short-lived and comparatively expensive. Complete replacement is often the best answer. Choose a reputable company with guarantees. Replace any displaced flashings from where they came from and re-fix using matching materials. Spread out heat absorbing stones and add new to cover sparse areas. Clean and repaint reflective paints once dull or damaged.
	Check the condition of anything that penetrates the roof covering. Such as vent pipes, dormers, Velux type 'in roof' type windows, access fixtures, fire escape equipment etc. Check especially the weather seals from the item down onto the roof covering for damage or displacement.	Replace anything that's missing. Re-seat anything that's displaced or dislodged. Repair any damaged or failing flashings, seals, and rubber boots etc to maintain a watertight seal down or onto the roof covering.
	VALLEYS Check any valleys between roofs for tears, splits, blockage or damage. Metal or lead work can split if it's too thin or laid in long lengths. Joints are a good thing to allow thermal expansion and contraction.	Temporary repairs can me made using a variety of products such as a self-adhesive sealing strip like 'flashband' or even silicone sealant in a pinch, but replacing the damaged section is usually the only permanent solution. Lead can be welded, but this may cost more than a straightforward replacement, assuming that you can find someone who can still do it!
	CHIMNEY Check the condition of any chimneys you have with binoculars. Especially check the masonry towards the top. Look for spalling bricks, tilting or cracked chimney pots and eroded mortar joints. Check also for missing mortar on the very top, (flaunching) if you can see it. It's important to keep flaunching in good condition as it keeps water out of the chimneystack itself. Check also that the flashings are in place, tight to the wall and well secured into the mortar joints.	Push displaced flashings back into place, secure with clips (if applicable) and reseal with mortar or a special sealant for the material. Re-point any seriously eroded mortar joints with a matching mortar. Remove loose mortar from around chimney pots and replace the flaunching over the whole cap using a strong mortar (1:3 mix). Ensure flaunching falls away from the pots to the outside edge of the chimney brickwork. No part of the flaunching should be less than 30-40mm thick, (preferably more) to avoid failure from frost. *Never* attempt to inspect or work on a chimney unless you have a good head for heights, duh!
	TV EQUIPMENT Check aerials, satellite dish etc for security of their mountings and fasteners. Corrosion is often a problem.	Paint any rusty parts after wire brushing loose rust away. Rust stabilising paints such as Hammerite are good for this. It's probably easier and cheaper to replace really badly rusted mountings though.

INDOORS

BASEMENTS **TIP:** damp in basements is typically caused by... 1. Condensation (warm air meeting cold surfaces). 2. External surface runoff (water from the roof or yard). 3. Raised natural ground water levels.	Take notice of how the basement smells during your first few seconds down there. Look and feel for damp patches or cracks in the walls or floor, especially those facing outwards. Look for tell-tale white stains indicating dried out patches, salts (efflorescence) on the walls or loose materials/paint etc. Duct tape a sheet of foil or polythene to the wall for a few days; water on room side is condensation, water on the wall side is coming from the wall/outside.	Check regularly and keep a log of when the damp is worse. Note weather conditions. See the outdoors section to do as much as you can to keep water from getting into the wall from outside. Be aware it may take a long time for any external improvements you make to affect internal dampness. A solid wall can hold a lot of water, which dries out slowly. Improving heating and ventilation along with a de-humidifier may also help. If there is naturally occurring ground water then Google, "basement waterproofing" to learn more about waterproofing options open to you. No solution is cheap or simple though and many are arguably specialised jobs best left to good contractors.
FLOORING	Check all flooring for anything new or unusual and pay particular attention around exterior doors, around shower trays, sinks, toilets etc plus around refrigerators, washing machines and dishwashers etc. Look for localised discolouration, damage or different feeling areas of any kind. Investigate further anything you find straight away and remember that water can run a long way from the source of the problem.	Repair causes of damage to floors first (leaking shower doors, dishwasher etc). Remove damaged flooring as necessary. Repairs to sub floors might be required if damage is severe (for example, a water leak over chipboard floorboards). Allow time for any moisture to dry out before replacing floor coverings. Specialists are usually required to insert repairs on most floor coverings and the cost may approach outright replacement of the whole covering.
WALLS	Check for cracks and monitor them over time, noting any changes. Look also for discolouration or spoiling of finishes, especially around windows or next to external doorways. Check high up near the ceiling level, especially if there are bathrooms, kitchens, utility rooms or roofs above. Check for dents, holes and poor paint finishes.	Seasonal movement is difficult to 'cure'. Use flexible fillers or decorators caulk along with lining paper before re-painting. Some cracks at drywall junctions re-open each year. You could consider pulling out the old corner tape. Then find and remove the fasteners in the corner, followed by re-taping and filling the joint. This creates a 'floating' corner that 'might' resist the movement causing the cracking. It's a somewhat experimental solution though! Google "truss uplift" to learn more about this method. Re-decorate as required.
CEILINGS	Pretty much as above for walls with the addition of checking for sagging of older ceilings (might indicate that plaster has separated from the wooden lath)	Repair damage as above for walls. Wipe clean annually, especially around light fittings that attract dust.
WINDOWS	Check paint condition for dullness, flaking etc at least annually.	Thoroughly prepare and re-decorate any poor finishes as required.

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TIP: Avoid activities that increase humidity such as drying wet clothes indoors, and ensure that kitchen and bathroom extract fans operate properly. **TIP:** Check that cold air is not penetrating the external sealant around the window. **TIP:** Petroleum jelly (Vaseline), WD40 (based on fish oils), light machine oil and regular grease (lithium) etc. are good lubricants. Reapply often in dusty areas.	Check that hinges, stays, handles and locks are free and operate properly.	Wipe dust and debris from hinges and stays. Sparingly lubricate all moving parts, wiping away any excess with a lint free cloth.
	Condensation can cause problems on some older windows causing the timber to go rotten or mouldy.	Lessen condensation by improving ventilation and raising the average room temperature. In severe cases, you might have to leave the curtains or blinds open a little to allow the rooms heat to warm up the window past the 'dew' point.
	Check self-adhesive draught-proofing strips for gaps or displacement. Check brush type strips for debris.	Carefully cut and remove damaged or displaced sections and stick new pieces of draught-proofing strip into place. Clean around the inside parts of the window with a vacuum or brush to remove any build-up of debris. Vacuum debris from brush strips.
DOORS **TIP:** Remove hinge screws that won't tighten up and glue in a matchstick or two, snapping them off flush. Then replace the screw and tighten. There's usually no need to wait for the glue to set. **TIP:** Check for drafts in unusual places, around skirting boards, electrical sockets, pipes, vents, attic hatches etc.	Look for tight or uneven gaps between the door and frame that are allowing binding or catching. Most doors need 2or 3mm all around for good operation. Poke out paint from screw heads and check that the hinge screws are tight.	Make adjustments to improve the doors fit if possible. Hinges can be recessed further into the frame using a sharp chisel or packed out with cardboard shims before tightening up the screws. If the door has swelled, plane down the tight spot where the door catches the frame until it clears by 1 or 2mm.
	Check for missing paint or finishes on the doors edges.	Refinish bare areas.
	Check operation of hinges, locks and handles. Look for stiffness in operation or loose/slack parts.	Lubricate hinges, locks, handles, and other hardware annually (see windows tip for lube). Tighten loose fasteners and replace any worn out components.
	Check that draught proofing is in place. Don't forget the letterbox if you have one. Check for drafts using the back of a damp hand or a smoking incense stick.	Fill any gaps with draught-proofing strips. Remove damaged or displaced sections and stick new sections in place. Vacuum clean brush type strips.
KITCHEN AND OR UTILITY AREAS **TIP:** Your grandmother knows best when it comes to sink maintenance. Always wipe away splashed water from around the sink straight away. Never, ever let water sit on work surfaces around the kitchen sink. Avoid leaving a damp dishcloth on the sink edge too.	**CABINETS** Check cabinet doors and drawers for alignment to make sure nothing is catching.	Make sure hinge back plates are tight to the cabinet first, and then adjust hinges until the gaps between doors or drawers are even. Drawers often have adjusters on the side.
	KITCHEN SINK Check the seal between the kitchen sink and the work surface is intact. Especially at the rear of the sink where it gets wet most. Look for lifting of the work surface and or signs of damp underneath (yes you will have to empty all the junk out of the cupboard!	The best way to repair this is to remove the sink completely and reapply clear silicone sealant to it and re-set the sink. However, this can be difficult if 80% of the original sealant is holding firm. An intermediate repair is to scrape away the failed areas of sealant, clean thoroughly and re-apply new silicone sealant, smoothed over with a damp finger.

TIP: Don't forget to check and re-tighten any removed traps or pipes after a week or so, as boiling hot water etc can loosen newly tightened plastic fittings.	Check the trap or 'U' bends under the sink. This one has a lot to deal with on a daily basis from bits of food to grease and fat. Pop an old towel underneath first to catch spills.	Unscrew the bottom part of the trap and empty into a bucket. Clean parts with hot soapy water and replace. Make sure any washers or seals are in good condition. Screw up hand tight, taking care not to distort the seals.
	COOKER HOOD/EXTRACT Remove covers on the extract hood and check inside. There's usually a build-up of grease, even if there are filters etc. that can lead to nasty smells if left. Check condition of any replaceable filters or screens.	Unplug or isolate the fan/unit first. Use a good degreasing cleaner and plenty of kitchen paper or old rags. Be careful not to spray cleaner onto electrical parts. Put something onto the hob before you start to minimise the clean up afterwards. Replace filters or screens as per the manufacturer's recommendations.
TIP: Clean up refrigerator spills as they happen. Keeping sauce bottles etc clean helps... At least annually and preferably every three months, completely empty the refrigerator into coolers. Remove all shelves etc, wash with mild dishwashing soap and dry them. Clean inside the refrigerator using a couple of teaspoons of baking or bicarbonate of soda in a litre of water. A toothbrush is great for getting into corners. Allow to dry before putting everything back, minus the old stuff that needs throwing away!	**REFRIGERATOR** Check your refrigerator's drain for blockages or ice. Many refrigerators have a drain inside right at the back near the bottom, which can easily get clogged or even frozen.	Working inside the bottom rear of the refrigerator, find the drain and clean out any debris plus any ice. Don't use a knife etc to lever out ice because the plastic may be thin and brittle. Use a hairdryer for a minute or two on a warm setting and try again by hand/cloth.
	On freestanding refrigerators check the cooling fins (large black radiator on the whole of the rear) for dust at least annually.	Pull the refrigerator out to gain access to the rear. Using the little brush attachment on your vacuum cleaner, remove any dust from the radiator grid to improve efficiency.
	Check the magnetic seal around the door looking for debris, damage, splits etc. Leaks around the seal can cause the refrigerator to work extra hard to maintain cooling, using more electricity.	Clean away any grime or debris. Replace any damaged seals or if they don't maintain an airtight seal to the refrigerator cabinet.
	Check also that the refrigerator is sitting level. Wobbly refrigerators can struggle to maintain a good door seal, leading to inefficiency problems and overwork.	Adjust the screw in/out feet on the front or rear of the refrigerator to level it up. Some models have special adjusters (especially for rear feet) accessible through holes in the plastic front; turn these with a screwdriver, usually clockwise to go up and anti-clockwise for, yup you guessed it, to go down.
	Check any ventilation grills or vents for obstruction. Especially if you store stuff on the top of your refrigerator.	Make sure stuff hasn't migrated back and covered the refrigerators ventilation areas because this will increase electricity consumption as the refrigerator struggles to keep cool.
	WASHING MACHINE Check your washing machines water hoses for damage such as bulges, perishing or surface splits. Whilst you have the water hoses off, check the washers in the ends. Deeply grooved, hard or thin ones are vulnerable and may soon leak. Also, check the machines waste water pipe for splits and make sure it's secure, cable ties are good here.	Turn off the isolating valve first. Unscrew hose ends and check hoses for perishing, splits or undue stiffness. Pull out the washers in the hose connectors and if showing any wear or damage at all, replace them, making sure they seat properly, below the threads and over the little raised centre section. Consider replacing the hoses/washers if they are more than 5 years old, regardless of the results of a visual inspection. It's likely the

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TIP: Common cause of fires as lint builds up at an incredible rate if unchecked.		hoses will be stiff and hard after this time and washers compressed.
	Washing machines vibrate….a lot! So check that the machine is still level and in place from time to time.	Adjust the screw up/down feet until level. Tighten up any locking nuts on the feet once adjusted.
	Check the machines soap dispensers. They usually build up quite a bit of old powder and fabric softeners.	Read the machines instructions and remove the drawer. Soak the drawer in hot water for a few minutes and then scrub with a washing up brush. Dry and replace.
	TUMBLE DRYERS Check all lint filters; there may be more than one. Check water reservoirs on condensing dryers.	Clean lint filters and empty water reservoirs before using, every time. Occasionally remover the condenser (bottom behind panel usually) and rinse away any dust and lint (shower works well). Wipe down rubber seals and re-fit the dry condenser.
BATHROOM **TIP:** Leave trickle vents open in bathrooms to allow condensation from drying towels to escape.	**DAMP** Look for water damage everywhere. Can show as discolouration or swellings, lumps, bumps or bubbles depending on the material.	Rectify source of water ingress first. Possible causes could be condensation, a leaking pipe or faulty appliance/fitting. Remove damaged material and replace as necessary.
TIP: If your bathtub silicone keeps splitting, remove the bath panel and check that the bathtub is properly supported. Each leg should be tight down to the floor. Check that legs are positioned close to a floor joist or on a timber spreader. Legs sitting on floorboards only (e.g. in between floor joists) can flex under a full load. Wind them up (one at a time) and slip a hefty lump of timber under them, if possible. 50mm x 100 or 150mm (2"x 4" or 6"), long enough to span two joists is good. Then wind the leg back down onto the spreader.	**SILICONE SEALANT** Check silicone sealant seals between differing materials and changes of direction, classic ones are:- - Bathtub to ceramic tile. - Sink to ceramic tile. - Toilet to floor. - Shower to ceramic tile. - Ceramic tile-to-tile at corners. But you may also have:- - Ceramic tile to timber. - Ceramic tile to window. - Floor to wall. Look for splits, often caused by seasonal movement of the house, poor support of heavy items (like the bath) or simply old, ineffective or poor quality silicone. Look for black mould which could be a sign of poor ventilation/lack of heating/standing water etc.	Scrape away the old sealant and thoroughly clean surfaces. Especially tiles, which can harbour really hard to shift deposits from soap and minerals. If you're worried about making a mess stick masking tape around 5 or 6mm out from the corner on both the surface and wall. Apply a steady bead of sealant in between the tapes and smooth off in one go using a silicone smoothing tool or a wet finger. Wipe any silicone sealant sticking to your finger onto a tissue paper each time. Carefully remove the tape straight away. Gently and very lightly smooth any imperfections with a wet finger. Avoid cheap silicone sealant because it doesn't last very long. Look for silicone from well-known brands that contain mould inhibitors designed for sanitary ware. Avoid using silicone up to painted surfaces, as it cannot be over-painted. Silicone tools that have a rubber blade can work well as they remove excess silicone from both surfaces.

TIP: Practice your silicone skills on the inside corners of a cardboard box first!	**MOULD** Check for black spots of mould everywhere, but particularly next to outside walls where cold air from outside can cause damp air to condense on the ceiling.	In the attic, ensure the insulation goes right up to the edge of the ceiling or preferably joins up with insulation from the wall. Check also that the insulation doesn't block any ventilation gaps, which allow air to flow into and out of the loft or attic space (cold roofs only).
TIP: Consider wiring the fan into the light circuit so that you can't 'forget' to turn it on.	**FANS** Check bathroom extract fan for efficiency to prevent damaging build-up of damp air during showers or drying clothes etc.	Switch the fan on and hold a sheet of paper up to the fan, it should snap onto the vent and stay in place by suction alone. Clean dust from the vents inside and out if possible.
PLUMBING **TIP:** Dismantle your tap/faucet and take the internal part to your merchant for advice and replacement parts.	**TAPS AND FAUCETS** Check taps or faucets for drips. Also check for ease of use, i.e. stiff or tight levers etc. which can be a sign of mineral deposits building up on components or hardening of rubber seals. The four main types or tap/faucet are compression (old-fashioned rubber washer) plus three 'washerless' types, ball, disc and cartridge. Repair kits or spare parts are available for all types.	Service dripping, tight or stiff taps by dismantling and replacing worn components. Switch off the water. Find the hidden screw that holds the handle in place. Remove all components and lay them out in logical order from left to right on a tea towel. Clean everything and lubricate rubber parts with plumbers silicone grease. Re-assemble in reverse order. If that doesn't work, then you'll need a suitable repair kit to replace worn parts. Some rubber parts can be lubricated and turned around to last a little longer. Old type rubber compression washers are cheaply replaced.
TIP: Check everything again for tightness after a few days, because expansion from hot water can 'loosen' fittings on newly fitted pipework.	**TRAPS** Watch for draining water going down slowly, often accompanied by 'glugging' or other watery sounds for some seconds afterwards, as this can mean a partially blocked trap or pipework. Traps are formed from pipework in a variety of shapes designed to 'hold' a little water trapped in the pipe forming a seal or as an 'all in one' bottle shaped design.	Place a thick folded towel in the bottom of the cleared out cabinet under the trap. Gently unscrew the bottom of the trap (bottle type) or unscrew compression-retaining collars (P, U or S pipe bends). Carefully remove the trap parts keeping them level and tip any water into a bucket (or the sink above, if the plug holds a good seal). Wash all parts thoroughly in hot soapy water and replace, hand tight. Check for leaks before removing the towel.
TIP: Waste pipes can also be cleaned using store bought drain cleaning chemicals. Homemade recipes also exist online to make your own cleaning chemicals using baking powder and vinegar or soda crystals and boiling water etc.	**WASTE PIPES** Problems with noise and/or slow draining can mean there's an obstruction in the pipe going to the main drain. **NOTE:** You might need to dismantle or remove the trap under the sink to gain access the main pipework if there are no other access points.	First thing to try is the old fashioned but effective, sink plunger. Block off any overflow holes with a suitably sized cork, screwed up rubber glove, cloth or your thumb etc. Place the plunger over the plughole and pump up and down. Run a little water into the sink as well to get things moving. Plunging pulls the water up and down the pipe rapidly and usually clears obstructions quite impressively. For blockages that are more serious, use a cheap plumbers drain clearing tool. This is a long flexible spring that you insert into the pipe and wind around and around, up and down to physically clear away blockages.

Area	What to look for	What to do
TIP: Having your boiler serviced annually is cheaper and safer than calling an engineer when there is an emergency. Being a regular client with your local plumbing and heating engineer might also mean better service for those other little jobs you need help with. **TIP:** Don't forget frozen pipes burst and leak when they thaw not when they freeze!	**BOILERS/HEATERS** Check any vents and that everything works properly. Get any gas heating systems inspected by a heating engineer annually. Peace of mind for less than a day's wages. Check your carbon monoxide detectors if you're burning gas.	Clean all vents and grills to ensure good airflow. Vacuum cleaners and a soft paintbrush are good for this. Remove any obstructions from around vents to ensure good airflow around the whole unit (such as boxes, coats, stored goods etc).
	OVERFLOWS Check overflow pipes that stick out from your walls, or roof line for drips or leaks. They should be dry.	Investigate the other end of the pipe inside the house (bathroom or attic usually) to find out why the water level is creeping up past normal levels. Replace worn washers on shut off valves or replace the whole valve.
	EXTERNAL TAPS AND PIPES. Obviously, water freezes so check all pipes that live outside have a means to isolate and drain them ready for the winter.	Invest in winter covers for outside taps and install isolation valves on the warm side of pipes heading outside. Don't forget to switch them off and drain them in late autumn before serious frosts can cause damage.
ELECTRICAL SYSTEM **TIP:** Remember to keep a torch on, or very close to your consumer unit in a place you can find in total darkness. **TIP:** Many fires are started by appliances and their power cords rather than the house wiring itself. Avoid overloading outlets.	**SAFETY TRIP SWITCH** Look at your consumer unit (fuseboard) and check the 'trip switch' if equipped.	Follow the instructions printed next to the trip switch. Usually you just press the button and this 'trips' the whole power to the house. Re-set by lifting the main breaker switch.
	SWITCHES AND POWER OUTLETS Check for security and integrity. Make sure that those new appliances added through the year don't lead to permanent extension leads or multi way plug adapters.	Replace any broken switch or power outlets. Consider hiring an electrician to add additional power sockets in areas with lots of appliances such as behind entertainment centres.
	APPLIANCES Check leads and plugs for splits, stray wires or any other damage. Check that the outer insulation is secure in the plug and the coloured inner cores are not visible.	Replace any damaged cable immediately. Unscrew the cover from plugs with visible inner cores and loosen the cable clamp, push the outer insulation through the cable clamp and re-tighten. Replace the plug cover, being careful not to trap the inner cores.
ATTIC OR LOFT **TIP:** If your attic doesn't have floorboards, wear boots or sturdy footwear to increase your stability when stepping from joist to joist. **TIP:** Consider building 'rat runs' from old planks or floor boards, screwed to the ceiling joists to give you safe and accident free access to areas you might need to get too in an emergency.	**WATER MARKS** Check for stains on roof members, gable ends and chimneys. Often seen as whitish areas that have dried out. Obviously checking after it has been raining for a few hours might enable you to see leaks as they happen. Look for dark patches and feel them to confirm it's wet if possible.	On the next dry day, inspect the roof above the area where you suspect the leak and remedy any defects you find (missing/broken tiles, poor flashings etc). Be warned that water can 'travel' along roof timbers inside and leak some distance away from the actual problem with the roof covering.
	UNWANTED CREATURES. Look for small holes in timber and especially for 'frass' (insect droppings) which can look like sawdust, as this may mean you have	Depending on the severity of the evidence, you might consider calling in pest control experts, as dealing with woodworm can involve some pretty strong chemicals. Deal with small infestations by soaking the affected timber with a proprietary woodworm killing chemical.

TIP: Rodent dropping and bat dropping can look similar, but bat droppings crumble to dust when crushed. Rodent droppings are usually more solid.	wood worm or other wood eating insects.	Always follow the instructions when using pesticides.
	Look for evidence (nests, droppings, gnawing, tracks, etc) that might mean that you have non-paying 'tenants' in your home; *birds, squirrels, mice, or even rats* are common. Try to find their access holes. Sprinkle flour or talcum power around and look for tracks after a couple of days. Birds and squirrels usually come in through gaps or holes under tiles or timberwork at eaves level. Rodents can get in from just about anywhere. Whilst these animals don't normally cause serious damage, over time they will enlarge access holes and mess from nests will build up. Mice and rats will cause problems deeper in the house as they look for food. Birds and squirrels look for food outdoors. Large nests are likely to be from squirrels, as they often like to stay in the same place for several generations.	Wait until the nesting season is over and any young have left the nest. Go into the attic and make enough noise to scare away any animals present. Fill in any entrance holes. Mortar or wire (chicken mesh) balled up and pushed or fastened into place works well. Clear away any old nests or debris. Remove any branches or vegetation that overhang or are close to your roof to make climbing up there more difficult for squirrels particularly. Seal any holes you can find in your exterior walls to help prevent rodents getting in again. Old pipe holes, cable holes, broken vents and gaps around doorframes. Anything bigger than one centimetre is a potential access point. Don't forget any holes inside outbuildings such as garages or storage areas that join onto the main house.
TIP: Most people forget to insulate the loft or attic hatch on cold roofs. Fit a piece of polystyrene (or two or three!) to the back of the loft hatch using double-sided tape or a polystyrene safe adhesive. Don't forget to add a compressible weather-strip seal to the edge where the hatch sits to make it airtight and stop warm air from getting into the cold attic space and causing condensation.	**BATS** Watch your roof from outside at dusk in the summer time and you should see them leave or listen for the young bats 'chattering' at dawn when they are hungry and waiting for the adults to return and feed them.	Absolutely nothing! In fact, bats are useful creatures that don't cause any damage to your home, no nests, no dangerous mess etc. Enjoy sharing your home with these creatures or face a visit from your local constabulary, because they probably have more rights to be in your house than you do!
	INSULATION Attic spaces are gradually filling up with insulation as regulations add a little each time. Check that you have a good depth over the whole area. Minimum of 100mm (4") but 200mm or more is better. Current recommended depth in UK is 270mm (almost 11") in 2013.	Add new insulation on top of your existing insulation. If you have/want floorboards, first top up the fibreglass in between the ceiling joists, then use rigid underfloor type polystyrene on top of the ceiling joists before placing the floorboards on top glued together at the joints (floating). Alternatively raise the depth of the ceiling joists by adding timber to the tops before filling with fibreglass and boarding the top (fixed).
TIP: All roofs need ventilation to minimise damp problems caused by warm air rising from living spaces and	**TANKS** In cold attics, check any water tanks (plus the pipes that feed them) to ensure they are well wrapped with insulation to protect against freezing.	Juggle any slipped insulation back into place and secure using duct tape or string.

Area	What to look for	What to do
condensing on cold roof coverings.	Old metal water or central heating tanks need checking for leaks or weeping due to corrosion.	Consider replacing any old metal tanks at your earliest convenience because it's a case of when rather than if they will leak.
	VENTILATION Check for vents, at eaves level (strips or circles of mesh), in gable end walls (airbricks) and at ridge level (ridge tile vents) plus any vents you see in the roof covering (tile vents).	Move any loft insulation that's blocking any ventilation gaps or systems. Clear debris/etc from any partially blocked screens, airbricks, vents, or mesh etc by gently brushing, using a vacuum cleaner or blowing them through with compressed air if you have a compressor. Also, see 'roofline' above, some of these vents are easier to access from outside.
	FAN DUCTING Check that any ducting for fans (bathroom, kitchen etc) is still in place and connected.	Inspect joints for tightness and refasten or re-tape any that are loose or leaking. Leaking ducting can cause condensation problems when the warm air hits the underside of a cold roof.