



NHBC

Guide to your new home...

A practical guide to looking after your new home

How to run your home...

NHBC Home User Guide



Settling into your home

Like most new things, a home needs to be taken care of. In the first few months, it's especially important that your home is allowed to 'settle' – this includes allowing it to dry out gently. During this period, you may notice minor cracks in walls, gaps in joinery and white deposits on the walls – all are completely normal in new homes, and may occur regardless of the measures you take to ensure that they do not. However, you can certainly reduce the chance of this happening by following the steps outlined in this section.

Drying out

Small cracks in the walls and gaps in joinery are both common signs of shrinkage. This happens when timbers and other materials contract as they dry out. It's extremely unlikely that these cracks are anything structurally significant, and they can normally be put right very easily with ordinary filler and a simple lick of paint during routine redecoration. To keep cracks and gaps to a minimum, you need to allow all the materials used in constructing your home to dry out gradually. Shrinkage is accelerated by heat, so you need to be sparing with it. Try to keep an even temperature throughout your home and, if you move in during the winter months, don't be tempted to turn the central heating up to its highest setting. Leaving your windows open (or at least the vents within their frames) will help to ventilate your home and allow moisture to evaporate more naturally. The length of time your house takes to dry out depends on how it was built and what sort of weather conditions there are when you first move in. Generally speaking, it will take around nine months to a year.

Efflorescence

The appearance of a white deposit on the wall (known as efflorescence) can also be an effect of the drying-out process. These white deposits are actually natural salts that come out of the wall materials, and are quite normal. These salts are not harmful and usually disappear over time, and where they appear on internal walls, they can be brushed or wiped away. However, if the white deposits continue to appear on internal walls, it could indicate something more serious, such as a water leak. If that's the case, you need to contact your builder or a competent tradesperson as soon as possible.

Condensation

Condensation is caused by steam or water vapour coming into contact with cold surfaces, such as walls, ceilings and windows. Condensation can be the result of evaporation of moisture from building materials, which is quite common in new homes. If allowed to persist, condensation can result in

the appearance of mould on interior surfaces and even on furnishings.

Condensation will gradually reduce as the building dries out, but you should avoid contributing to it if you want prevent the appearance of mould on walls and ceilings. There are a number of things you can do, even after the building itself has finished drying out, to protect your home against harmful levels of condensation:

- Open windows or window vents to allow trapped moisture to escape.
- If a mechanical ventilation or heat recovery (MVHR) system has been installed in your home, ensure that you familiarise yourself with the manual and manufacturer's guidance. It is important to understand how these systems operate in order to run your home effectively.
- Cover pans when cooking to reduce steam and use the extractor fan where possible.
- Always use the extractor fan when bathing or taking a shower.
- Stop moist air spreading around your home by keeping doors closed when cooking or bathing.
- Avoid drying clothes indoors, especially on radiators.
- If you have one, make sure your tumble dryer's venting duct leads outside (unless it is a self-condensing dryer).
- Heat your home evenly and consistently. Ideally, you shouldn't leave your heating off all day, as when you return home in the evening and start cooking or washing, moist warm air will be created, which will settle on the cold surfaces and create condensation. Program your central heating to come on shortly before you return.

Don't let condensation mould become a problem. Preventing it is much easier than getting rid of it!

Condensation in your roof space

In cold weather, you may notice some moisture on the underside of the felt beneath your roof tiles. This is due to any warm, moist air from your home passing into the roof space and settling on the cold surface of the felt and timbers. As the roof space is ventilated/breathable, this should gradually disperse without any issues arising, and following the general tips on reducing condensation will help keep any moist air that does escape into the roof down to a minimum.

Essential services

Electricity - Where does it come from?

Electricity is normally supplied via an underground cable, which is connected to your meter (used for measuring energy consumption in kWh). In some cases, electricity may be sourced directly from an on-site generator such as a wind turbine, solar panel or combined heat and power (CHP) unit.

How does it work?

From the meter, cables run out to your consumer unit (often referred to as a fuse box). This contains the main on/off switch and a number of miniature circuit breakers (MCBs), which protect individual circuits. An MCB will automatically disconnect the supply of electricity if one of the circuits is overloaded or there is a fault. You can reset an MCB by simply switching it back to the 'on' position.

A consumer unit will also often contain a residual current device (RCD), which provides additional shock protection. An RCD which has 'tripped' can be reset by returning the switch to the 'on' position. RCDs should be periodically tested to ensure they are functioning correctly: you can do this by pressing the 'test' button.

WARNING: If an MCB or RCD trips repeatedly, there may be a fault with an appliance or the installation. You should contact a professional electrician for help.

From the consumer unit, electricity is distributed around your home via a series of cables. These are usually concealed within walls or under floors. Cables above a ceiling or under a floor may be run in any position, but those found in walls should have been installed by your builder as follows:

- Vertically above or below a socket outlet or switch being served.
- Horizontally on either side of the socket or switch.
- Horizontally in a band within 150mm (6") of the ceiling.
- Vertically in a band within 150mm (6") of the corner of a room in each wall.

Water

Where does it come from?

Water is supplied by a regional water company through an underground service pipe. This pipe is fitted with a stop valve, which can be found at the boundary of your property. Its position allows the water company to turn off the supply in an emergency or for maintenance. Please make a note of the precise location of your stop valve. You may also have one within your home - make a note of this location too (often under the kitchen sink).

In some cases, water may be sourced directly from an on-site rain or waste-water harvester – water collected this way is often used for flushing toilets.

How does it work?

From the stop valve, water enters the 'rising main' and is distributed around the home via a direct or indirect feed system.

So what's the difference between a direct and indirect feed system?

In a direct feed system, all cold water taps and WC cisterns are fed directly from the rising main. Hot water is provided at mains pressure by an unvented hot water storage system or a combination boiler.

In an indirect feed system, the rising main supplies water to a storage cistern, which is usually installed in the loft. From here, water is redistributed to the taps, WCs and the hot water cylinder. However, in most cases, the kitchen tap will still be directly connected to the rising main (for drinking water).

Which do I have?

To find out which type of water feed system you have, all you need to do is close the main stop valve. If the system is direct, the flow will stop all cold water taps and WCs; if indirect, only the kitchen sink will be affected.

Gas

Where does it come from?

Gas is supplied by an energy company and enters your home through a service pipe that terminates at the control valve, which can be found next to the meter. The meter, which is usually installed outside the building (either on a wall or partially buried in the ground), is used to measure gas consumption in cubic metres or cubic feet. Your builder should have given you a key that opens the meter cupboard so you can read the meter or close the control valve in an emergency.

How does it work?

Gas is fed to the central heating boiler and other gas appliances (such as an oven) through pipework, which may be concealed within walls and under floors.

WARNING: You should always contact a professional gas engineer who is listed on the Gas Safe Register to deal with problems with your gas supply or appliances.

Central heating

With a better understanding of your central heating system, you can:

- Improve thermal efficiency
- Lower your energy costs
- Reduce your carbon footprint.

How does it work?

Most new homes are fitted with a hot water central heating system which consists of a boiler, radiators, a pump and several controls. Water heated by the boiler is pumped around the radiators through pipework that is usually concealed within the floors and walls.

Some central heating systems may include a ground or air source heat pump, a biomass boiler/burner, or even solar panels/tiles. Your builder will have informed you if you have any of these systems in place.

Operating instructions for your central heating system should have been provided by your builder. If not, you should ask for them.

Boilers will usually have a programmer that allows you to turn the heating on and off, and to adjust the settings to suit your requirements. You can easily program the heating to stay on for longer in the colder winter months. A room thermostat and/or thermostatic radiator valves are normally provided to regulate individual room temperatures.

Watch out for hidden cables and pipes

WARNING: Always take care to establish the exact position of cables and pipes which are embedded in walls or under floorboards. You can do this using a cable detector.

NHBC

NHBC Buildmark is a 10 year new home warranty and insurance policy for new build homes. For most people, buying a new home is the largest investment they will ever make. Buildmark is designed to protect this investment from major structural defects if the property has not been built to NHBC's technical standards.

80% of new homes are covered by Buildmark

Buildmark covers 80% of all new homes built in the UK each year. Builders and developers choose it for their developments so that new home buyers are protected from exchange of contracts.

What's not covered?

Buildmark does not cover general wear and tear, condensation, normal shrinkage, cosmetic damage or damage arising from failure to maintain the property. You should refer to your policy document for information on all the exclusions and limitations that apply.

For more information please visit: **NHBC** Website

Download the Guide to your new home



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If you want to ask us anything about our developments or our homes then simply send us an email and one of our sales team will be happy to answer your questions.