

The impact of winter pressures on different population groups in Great Britain: 18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024

29 January 2024

Summary

This report talks about;



The rates of adults experiencing winter insecurity; specifically heating insecurity and food insecurity



The characteristics of those experiencing winter insecurity



The actions and impacts this is having on adults in Great Britain



This is based on a report published by ONS on 29 January 2024, entitled;
[The impact of winter pressures on different population groups in Great Britain: 18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024](#)

The impact of winter pressures

The impact of the increased cost of living on people has been well documented and many factors can put **added pressures** on people during cold weather. Using new data between **18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024**, we identified two impact variables that demonstrate key pressures based on two basic needs; **heating and eating**.



The inability to keep warm at home in the past two weeks (heating insecure)

Almost 1 in 5 (19%) adults reported they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never, able to keep comfortably warm in their home; slightly lower than late autumn and winter 2022 (24%).

These adults were more likely to be;

- Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (44%)
- experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (36%)
- living in the most deprived areas in England (30%)
- disabled (24%)
- younger (22% aged 16 to 29, 26% aged 30 to 49, 17% aged 50 to 64, 9% aged 65 and over)

Around three-quarters (76%) of adults experiencing **heating insecurity** found it very or somewhat difficult to afford their energy bills



The inability to acquire enough food in the past two weeks (food insecure)

Around 1 in 25 (4%) adults reported that their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past two weeks; similar to late autumn and winter 2022 (5%).

These adults were more likely to be;

- Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (17%)
- experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (14%)
- economically inactive, but not retired (12%)
- living in the most deprived areas in England (9%)
- disabled (8%)

Adults experiencing **food insecurity** appeared more financially vulnerable. Of these, nearly 9 in 10 (87%) found it very or somewhat difficult to afford their energy bills

Background

Winter pressures – This release aims to understand the extent to which adults in Great Britain are experiencing food and heating insecurity during the autumn and winter period. We also explored their experiences of being on an NHS waiting list, their ability to access GP services, housing insecurity and how these impact their health and well-being.

In previous releases relating to the [Cost of Living](#) and [Winter Pressures](#), we identified common themes among the groups of people more likely to be impacted by insecurities.

This release revisits this analysis, where we:

- Pooled 5 waves of data during the run up and including the start of winter (18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024)
- Looked at 2 measures of **winter insecurity** to identify adults at higher risk this winter, focussing on a proxy for
 - **“heating insecurity”** (adults who reported being “occasionally, hardly ever or never” able to keep comfortably warm at home in the past 2 weeks)
 - **“food insecurity”** (adults who reported they or their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past 2 weeks)
- Identified relationships between winter pressures and financial vulnerability, and their impact on health and well-being
- Looked at how this winter compares to last year

Note:

- This autumn / winter refers to the period between 18 October 2023 and 1 January 2024
- Last autumn / winter refers to the period between 22 November and 18 December 2022

Levels of winter insecurity

Using a proxy to indicate the level of insecurity during
winter

Levels of winter insecurity in Great Britain

Using a proxy to indicate the level of insecurity during winter



- The inability to keep comfortably warm at home in the past two weeks (heating insecure)
- The inability to acquire enough food for their household in the past two weeks (food insecure)

We looked at these two key impact variables as a proxy for people's level of insecurity during autumn / winter.

Proxy	Low risk	Medium risk		Increased risk
Heating insecure: Unable to keep comfortably warm at home in the past two weeks	No	Yes	No	Yes
Food insecure: Run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past two weeks	No	No	Yes	Yes
Total (in Great Britain)	41,200,100 (80%)	8,869,500 (17%)		1,401,100 (3%)

- Over a million (1.4 million) adults (3%) were at **increased risk** of insecurity during winter, reporting they were **unable to keep comfortably warm in their home** in the past two weeks (occasionally, hardly ever or never), and that they had **run out of food and could not afford to buy more** in the past two weeks
- A further 8.9 million adults (17%) reported that they were experiencing either one of the insecurity indicators (either **unable to keep comfortably warm** in their home or that they had **run of food and could not afford to buy more**) putting them into the **medium risk** category
- The remaining 41.2 million adults (80%) were **able to keep comfortably warm** (often, always or some of the time) and **acquire enough food** to put them at **low risk** of winter insecurity

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

Detailed characteristics

Groups of the population appearing more vulnerable

Characteristics by the likelihood of winter insecurity

Age & Sex

	Increased risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Aged 16 to 29	4%	20%	76%
Aged 30 to 49	4%	23%	73%
Aged 50 to 64	2%	16%	82%
Aged 65 and above	<1%	9%	91%
Male	2%	17%	81%
Female	3%	18%	79%

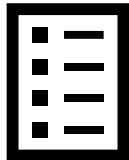
3% (1.4 million) of all adults were at increased risk of winter insecurity (unable to keep comfortably warm in their home and had run out of food in the past two weeks).

These were more likely to be younger (under 50);

- Around 1 in 25 (4%) adults were aged 16 to 29
- Around 1 in 25 (4%) adults were aged 30 to 49

Compared with <1% of those aged 65 who were at increased risk

Our previous analysis looked at the [characteristics associated with experiencing insecurity](#) and found similar results;




- Adults aged 30 to 64 years had between 1.5 and 1.8 higher odds of experiencing some degree of **energy insecurity** when compared with those aged 65 years and over,
- while adults aged 16 to 64 years had between 2.0 and 4.6 higher odds of experiencing **food insecurity** when compared with adults aged 65 years and over.

Adults born before 25th September 1957 are eligible to receive government support for their energy costs known as the Winter Fuel Payment

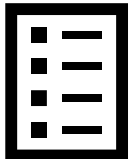
Characteristics by the likelihood of winter insecurity

Disability & Health

	Increased risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Disabled	6%	20%	74%
Non-disabled	1%	16%	83%
At risk of cold-related illnesses			
At risk of cold-related illnesses	4%	16%	81%
Not at risk of cold-related illness	2%	18%	80%
Has a general health condition			
Has a general health condition	4%	18%	78%
No general health condition	2%	17%	82%
Moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms			
Moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms	10%	30%	60%
No or mild depressive symptoms	1%	15%	84%

3% (1.4 million) of all adults were at increased risk of winter insecurity (unable to keep comfortably warm in their home and had run out of food in the past two weeks).

- Disabled adults were more likely to report this (6%) than non-disabled adults (1%)
- Adults experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms were more likely to report this (10%) (compared with 1% with no or mild depressive symptoms)
- 3 in 10 (30%) adults with moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms reported to experience medium insecurity risk; twice as much as those with no or mild depressive symptoms (15%)
- Adults who had a general health condition (4%) or at an increased risk of cold-related illnesses (4%) were more likely to be at increased risk of winter insecurity than those who did not




Our previous analysis looked at the [characteristics associated with experiencing insecurity](#) and found that;

- Adults who reported moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms had higher odds of experiencing some form of energy (2.3 higher odds) and food insecurity (3.1 higher odds) than those with no or mild depressive symptoms.

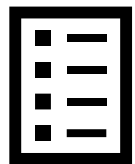
Characteristics by the likelihood of winter insecurity

Employment, income, IMD and dependent child

	Increased risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Employed	2%	19%	79%
Economically inactive – not retired	9%	26%	66%
Most deprived IMD quintile	7%	25%	68%
Least deprived IMD quintile	1%	10%	88%
Living with at least 1 dependent child	4%	19%	76%
No dependent child	2%	17%	81%
Find energy bills very difficult	24%	48%	29%
Find rent or mortgage payments very difficult	22%	41%	38%

3% (1.4 million) of all adults were at increased risk of winter insecurity (**unable to keep comfortably warm** in their home and **had run out of food** in the past two weeks).

- Economically inactive (not retired) adults were more likely to report being at an increased risk (9%) than all adults and more likely than those who were employed (2%)
- Adults in the most deprived areas of England were more likely to report being at an increased risk (7%) than adults living in the least deprived areas (1%)
- Nearly one quarter of all adults who found it difficult to afford energy bills were in the increased risk group (24%), which was similar for those finding rent/mortgage payments very difficult (22%)




Our analysis [last winter 2022](#) showed that:

- people living in the most deprived IMD were more likely than those in the least deprived IMD to report not being able to keep comfortably warm at home and more likely to be ‘somewhat’, or ‘very’ worried their food would run out before they had money to buy more in the past two weeks

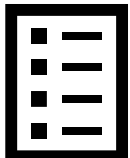
Characteristics by the likelihood of winter insecurity

Ethnicity

	Increased risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Asian or Asian British	2%	30%	68%
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	8%	45%	48%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	4%	21%	75%
White	3%	16%	82%
Other ethnic groups	11%	28%	61%

3% (1.4 million) of all adults were at increased risk of winter insecurity (**unable to keep comfortably warm** in their home and **had run out of food** in the past two weeks).

- Around 1 in 10 adults in Other ethnic groups (11%) were in the increased risk category.
- Black, African, Caribbean or Black British were more likely to be at increased risk to winter insecurity (8%) than Asian or Asian British adults (2%).
- Over half of Black, African, Caribbean or Black British adults were in the medium or increased risk groups.



Our previous analysis looked at the [characteristics associated with experiencing insecurity](#) and found that;

- Adults of ethnic minority had higher odds (x1.6) of experiencing food insecurity than White adults.

Medium Risk: heating insecure or food insecure



The ability to keep warm at home in the past two weeks



The ability to acquire enough food in the past two weeks

Adults who were heating insecure but not food insecure were younger and twice as likely to be out of work

Heating insecure, not food insecure: unable to keep warm (occasionally, hardly ever or never), but did not run out of food in the past two weeks
Food insecure, not heating insecure: able to keep warm (often, always or some of the time), but ran out of food in the past two weeks

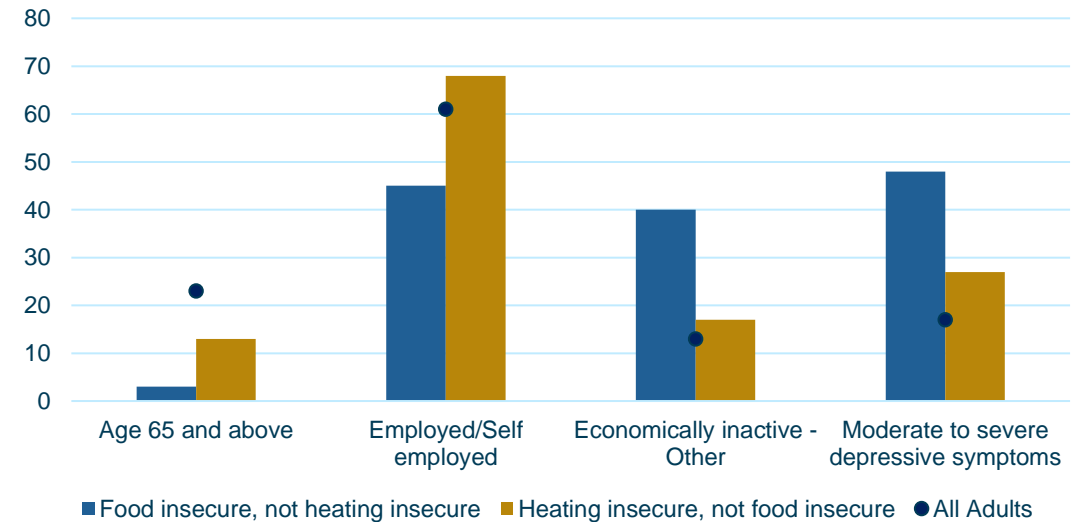
We looked more closely at those within the **medium risk** group.

23% of adults in our research / survey were aged 65 and over. When looking at the food insecure but not heating insecure group, 3% of adults were aged 65 and over. This increased to 13% of adults who were heating insecure and not food insecure.

Those who were food insecure and not heating insecure were also;

- Less likely to be in work; under half (45%) were employed compared with 68% who were heating insecure but not food insecure
- More likely to be inactive; 4 in 10 (40%) were economically inactive – not including retirement compared with 17% who were heating insecure but not food insecure
- More likely to be experiencing moderate to severe depression symptoms (48%) compared with 26% who were heating insecure but not food insecure

Significant differences between those who were either; heating insecure, not food insecure and food insecure, not heating insecure



NOTES:

- 1) All adults refers to the % of adults within each category responding to the OPN (e.g. 23% of adults were aged 65 and above in our survey)
- 2) Only significant differences between the groups (where CIs do not overlap) are presented in the chart

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Study (OPN)

Additional insights into the impact of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain

18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024

Energy and housing pressures

This pack has summarised some of the impacts of winter pressures on adults in Britain, looking at heating and food insecurities. This research also looked at a range of other measures, including energy and housing insecurities during the autumn and winter period.

New data (between 18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024) shows:



Nearly 4 in 10 (39%) adults found it somewhat or very difficult to afford their energy bills. This increased to;

- 61% of adults experiencing **moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms**
- 54% of adults who were **economically inactive** (not retired)
- 49% of **disabled adults**

Around 2 in 10 (19%) adults were 'occasionally, hardly ever or never' able to keep comfortably warm in their home in the past two weeks



Over a third (35%) of bill payers found it somewhat or very difficult to afford their rent or mortgage. This increased to;

- 55% of **Black, African, Caribbean or Black British** adults
- 45% of adults experiencing **moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms**
- 39% of **disabled adults**

Around 1 in 25 (4%) of all adults reported that their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past two weeks

Over 6 in 10 (62%) adults reported they were eating out less to save money on food

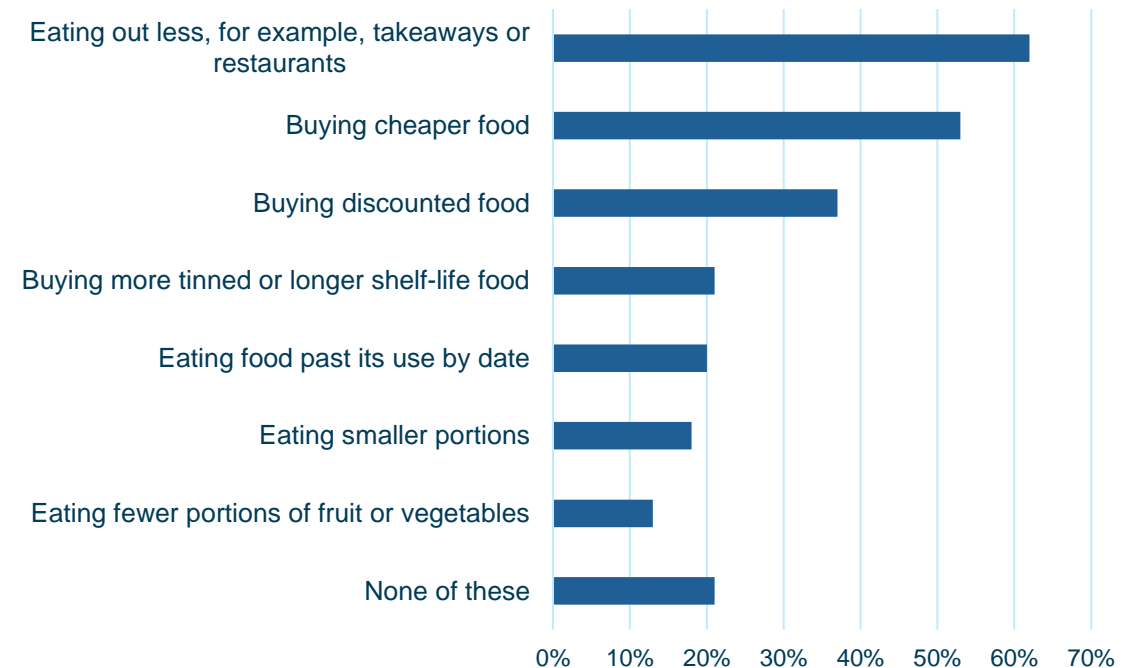
When we asked adults what actions they were having to take to save money on food because of the increased cost of living, the most common responses were:

- eating out less at, for example, takeaways or restaurants (62%)
- buying cheaper food (53%)
- buying discounted food (37%)

Around 1 in 5 adults (21%) reported **buying more tinned or longer shelf-life food**; 1 in 20 (20%) said they were **eating food past its use by date** and just under 1 in 20 (18%) said they were **eating smaller portions**. Adults more likely to report these actions were:

- experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (37%, 35% and 34% respectively)
- living in the most deprived areas in England (32%, 21% and 26% respectively)
- disabled (31%, 27% and 26% respectively)

Actions taken by adults to save money on food, Great Britain, 18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024



NOTES: 1) Base: All adults. 2) Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Around one quarter (24%) of adults reported that waiting too long for NHS services, and cutting back on energy use at home, had negatively affected their mental health

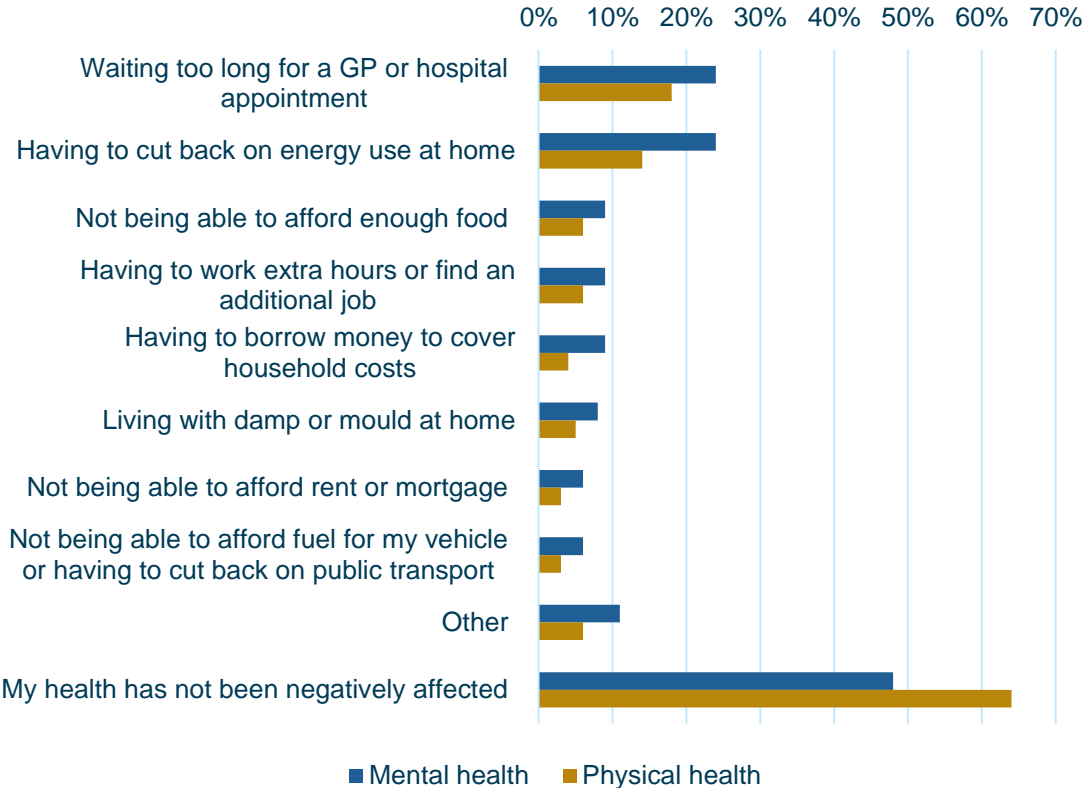
The most reported things which were negatively affecting adults' mental and physical health in the past month were:

- waiting too long for a GP or hospital appointment (24% reported a negative impact on mental health, 18% on physical health)
- having to cut back on energy use at home (24% reported a negative impact on mental health, 14% on physical)

A higher proportion of adults reported that having to cut back on energy use at home in the past month had a negative impact on their mental and physical health than:

- not being able to afford enough food (9% reported a negative impact on mental health, 6% on physical health)
- not being able to afford their rent or mortgage (6% reported a negative impact on mental health, 3% on physical health)

Proportion of adults reporting that winter pressures were having a negative impact on their mental or physical health, Great Britain, 18 October 2023 to 1 January 2024



NOTES: 1) Base: All adults. 2) Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)