

How to deal with damp

From clearing gutters to sorting crumbling mortar, banish this problem for good. By *Jayne Dowle*



Clearing or repairing gutters can be an easy solution
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Puzzled by weird brown stains on internal walls, that corner always feeling chilly or a strange musty smell near a window? It could be penetrating damp.

This peril is often a mystery to many of us. It often exists independently of other, more familiar, damp issues such as failed damp courses and mould-causing condensation.

“If you’ve found damp patches on your walls then this could be the result of penetrating damp,” says Nicholas Donnithorne, UK technical services manager at

Rentokil Property Care. “It’s the general name given to damp problems caused when rainwater makes its way into the internal part of your home through defects in the building structure.”

Here’s some expert advice on where to look, what to look for and when to call in the professionals.

Inspect gutters, downpipes and drains

Just a third of UK homeowners undertake a regular inspection of rainwater channels such as guttering and

downpipes, roof tiles and flashing, according to [Peter Cox](#), property preservation specialists Peter Cox. Yet damaged rainwater products that prevent rainwater from draining and directing water away from a home are a common cause of penetrating damp.

Donnithorne advises checking guttering for blockages or cracks and ensuring that downpipes are properly connected, with no gaps or faults in joints. “If rainwater goods are damaged it can mean brickwork gets soaked. The damage might even be caused by missing tiles in the roof or further cracks around the property.”

Clean and check gutters, ideally in spring and autumn, using a gloved hand or air compressor to scoop out dirt, leaves and debris.

It also possible to remove the blockage with water pressure, using a garden hose, says Heather Barrigan, spokeswoman for trades comparison website [MyJobQuote](#). “Alternatively, you could hire a drain cleaning or gutter vacuuming specialist company, typically priced from £80 to £100 for cleaning and unblocking services,” she says.

Seal cracks and leaking joints

Gutter repairs, such as resealing joints and reconnecting individual pieces, are fairly straightforward. The parts can



usually be snapped back together easily. DIY stores such as B&Q and Screwfix sell sealant, such as No Nonsense Roof & Gutter Sealant, £2.49, 310ml, and gutter parts. Look for good-quality parts with built-in rubber seals.

Professionals glue downpipe fittings together for extra durability as the bends can cause leaks under pressure.

If you are unsure or are concerned that your guttering may need replacing, hire a specialist. The cost will depend on where you live. Barrigan says: "For instance, in Sheffield a drain professional tends to charge just £30 per hour, while London-based tradespeople normally cost around £50 per hour or more."

Check chimney seals and flashing

Yellow-coloured stains around a chimney breast? It's an indication of water ingress and damp emanating from a chimney. Most likely, seals or flashing need repairing. This is a job for a professional. The roof is a daunting, and potentially expensive, area. Call for help sooner rather than later, as small problems can quickly escalate, especially in heavy weather.

If damp from your chimney becomes a persistent problem you will need expert help. A roofer should also inspect the roof and ridge tiles. These could be cracked, missing or loose, says Daniel Jones, spokesman for [Structural](#)

[Repairs](#), a Windsor-based repair company.

The National Federation of Roofing Contractors recommends that, unless it's an emergency situation, three quotations are provided, and to not opt for the cheapest unless you are convinced it is the best company for the job. You can find helpful advice at nfrc.co.uk.

If the job includes refurbishing more than half of a roof, you must employ a member of the NFRC Competent Person Scheme or notify your Local Authority Building Control before work starts. This is to ensure that the roof is upgraded to meet the thermal requirements of Part L of building regulations.

Check mortar and pointing

General wear and tear, including heavy rainfall, can cause exterior walls to crumble and mortar and pointing to break down. This will allow cold air and water to enter. If you notice stains on the inside or outside of your home, plus a damp smell, check exterior walls for disintegration.

Do you have white "weathered" patches on the bricks? They are not a period feature, but a sign of trouble. "Salting is a common symptom of damp that can be easily identified," Jones says. "Salting is where bricks have become porous and allow water ingress, causing the natural salts in the wall to

surface. This will appear like a white, almost fluffy, substance on the surface of the wall."

On porous stone walls, if the surface feels slightly sandy, this could be an indication that moisture is settling in. The pointing may need looking at, but first try a waterproof sealant such as Thompson's Water Seal, £21.99, 5 litres. You can also use this on brickwork.

Repointing (when crumbling mortar is removed and replaced) is a task for experienced DIY enthusiasts or professional builders. The cost ranges from £20 to £60 per square metre, says Barrigan, but you will also need to factor your location into the overall price:

"Builders in London, for example, charge a rate of £40 an hour or more, while someone living outside London may only end up spending around £30 per hour."

Watch those windows

Damaged windows, and corroded putty and sealant parting company with window frames, can allow rainwater inside and cause damp.

"Blocked drip grooves designed to take away rainwater underneath window sills are another problem," Jones says. "Owners can resolve this by ensuring that they clean drip grooves intently and, of course, repair or replace any windows that may have degraded." ■

