

Electrical safety

Electrical appliances, plugs and cables that are old or poorly wired can be dangerous. Just because there's no flame does not mean there's no fire risk. Find out what to check for to make sure your appliances don't put you, your family or housemates at risk from fire.

Danger signs

There are danger signs to look for on all electrical items you have at home. If you think something needs fixing or changing, do it immediately.

Plugs and sockets

For plugs and sockets, watch for:

- hot plugs or sockets, scorch marks, fuses that often blow or flickering lights - these are signs of loose wiring or other electrical problems
- badly wired plugs – any coloured wires sticking out could come loose and debris could also get into the plug
- overloaded sockets – plugging too many electrical appliances into one socket can lead to overheating

Cables and leads

Don't take risks with cables and leads. Check if leads are:

- frayed and damaged – make sure the outer covering is in good condition and replace if necessary
- positioned carelessly – don't leave leads near water, cookers, other heat sources or where someone could trip
- placed under rugs or carpets - don't put leads where they can wear through without anyone noticing

Appliances

For electrical appliances, you should not:

- get them wet – this includes plugs and sockets, for example, don't put a vase of flowers on top of a television
- leave them on at night – unless they are designed to be left on, like freezers
- put anything in the microwave that is made of metal, or has a metallic finish or parts

Maintenance

Electrical appliances, especially ones that run at high speeds and contain motors, like washing machines, should be serviced once a year by a qualified electrician.

Plugs, sockets and cables

Plugs, sockets and cables also need to be used correctly. You should:

- make sure you can't see any coloured wires between the plug and the power lead – change the plug properly
- make sure the wires are held firmly in place inside the plug
- use sockets safely – it's better to use a bar adaptor (multi board) on a lead than a block adaptor
- only use one adaptor per socket – don't plug one adaptor into another and try to keep to one plug per socket

Fuses

- When you're fitting or replacing a fuse, it's important to use the right fuse for the appliance to make sure the fuse doesn't overheat. Check the manual or look for a sticker on the appliance to find out its wattage and then use the right fuse:
- for appliances up to 700 watts, use a three amp fuse
- for appliances between 700 and 1,000 watts, use a five amp fuse
- for appliances over 1,000 watts, use a 13 amp fuse

Extension leads and adaptors have a limit on how many amps they can take. Don't overload extensions and leads.

Dealing with an electrical fire

If there is an electrical fire, pull the plug out or switch off the power at the fuse box, if it's safe to do so. Sometimes this can stop the fire immediately.

Never use water on an electrical fire, and don't take any risks with your safety. Get out, stay out and call 999.

Electrical safety during a power cut

Some advice to stay safe during a power cut:

- never approach broken lines or damaged poles and keep children and animals away - telephone [Northern Ireland Electricity](#) to report damage and listen to recorded messages carefully
- if you are using a generator, be careful where you site it in case of carbon monoxide poisoning
- turn off electric cookers, ovens, irons and other similar electrical appliances if electricity is lost
- leave a light switched on so you know when power has been restored
- take extra care if using candles, oil lamps or other naked flames
- test smoke alarms with fresh batteries
- make sure adequate ventilation if using gas heaters