

[Blind cord safety information and advice](#)

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Looped blind cords and chains can pose a risk of injury or worse to babies and small children. It's important that adults check their homes and take steps to make their blind cords safe.

Keep out of reach

Window blind cords and chains must be kept out of reach of babies and small children.

Simple steps – such as securing cords and chains with safety devices and keeping furniture away from windows so that children cannot climb on them – can help prevent deaths.

Toddlers aged between 16 and 36 months are most vulnerable. It can take as little as seconds for a toddler to lose their life from becoming entangled in a window blind cord or chain.

You should:

- look around your home from a child's point of view to help spot potential dangers
- examine every blind in your home – if they have a looped control chain or cord and do not have a safety device fitted, then you can easily install one of the many devices available
- make sure that all blind cords and chains cannot be reached by children
- move cots, beds, playpens, highchairs and any furniture away from windows and blinds – remember children love to climb
- when buying a new blind, always look for one that does not contain cords, has concealed cords or has an in-built safety device and that complies with the new European Standards

You can get more information and advice, including a helpful video, on the [blind cord safety](#) page.

For further advice on how to make your home blind cord safe, contact the home safety officer at your [local council](#) or your health visitor.

More useful links

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[Avoid getting caught out by scams](#)

Beware being caught out by fraudsters. There are countless ways that criminals have found to scam people out of their money, but there are steps to take to be wiser about scams and report anything you suspect is a scam.

Scams

If you respond to just one scam, your details are entered onto a list which can be used by other scammers. These are referred to as 'sucker lists'.

It's important that you seek help to avoid being scammed in the future.

Scams are ever changing and becoming more and more sophisticated and people are commonly targeted by email, phone and fake websites.

You can find out more, including a list of recent scams, in the following section:

Report a scam

Many people who are scammed feel they are to blame to falling for it, but it's not their fault.

Reporting scams is vitally important, as:

- it helps catch fraudsters
- it can help to alert others and prevent them from falling victim

If you have – or know someone who has – been a victim of a scam or fraud, no matter how small, you should report it to the [PSNI](#), [online to Consumerline](#) or [Action Fraud](#).

Remember, if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

More useful links

Barbecue and picnic food safety advice

If you're planning on having a barbecue or picnic, there are some tips to help prevent food poisoning. Remember that keeping food cool is important. Generally, the cooler the temperature the slower germs will grow.

Barbecues

The main food poisoning risks when using a barbecue are:

- undercooked meat
- spreading germs from raw meat onto food that's ready to eat

The safest option is to pre-cook your food indoors then put the cooked food on the outdoor barbecue for a short time for flavour.

When cooking burgers, sausages, kebabs, pork, turkey and chicken, always check that:

- the meat is steaming hot throughout
- there is no pink meat visible when you cut into the thickest part
- meat juices run clear

Once served, food should not sit out for longer than two hours, or one hour if it's very hot outside.

You can get more information and advice on the [food safety barbecuing page](#).

It's also important to be alert to the risks of [carbon monoxide when barbecuing](#).

Picnic food

Cases of [food poisoning](#) from campylobacter, E. coli, listeria and salmonella increase in the summer months.

Picnickers could be putting themselves at risk by:

- leaving their food out for longer than the recommended two hours
- carrying food to picnics in containers such as plastic bags and picnic baskets, rather than the recommended cool boxes
- putting picnic leftovers back in the fridge or using them for a meal the next day, regardless of how long they have been left out

To help everyone enjoy their summer picnics without worry, these easy tips can help keep you safe:

- rinse fresh fruits (including those with rinds) and vegetables under running tap water before packing them in the cool box
- place cold food in a cool box with ice or frozen gel packs – cold food

should be stored at 5 °C or below to prevent bacterial growth

- pack drinks in one cool box and perishable foods in another – if using freezer packs (frozen drinks work well for this purpose), distribute them throughout the box, not all at the bottom
- keep your cool box closed – once at the picnic site, limit the number of times the cool box is opened as much as you can (this helps to keep the contents cold for longer)

Once you've served the picnic, dishes should not sit out for longer than two hours, or one hour if it's very hot outside.

After this, the risk of bacteria increases and it becomes unsafe to eat, so best to throw it away when you get home.

Find out more on the [cooking for parties and events page](#).

More useful links

[Warning about fake dress websites](#)

Beware websites posing as UK-based businesses, selling poor quality dresses at knockdown prices. You should be cautious when buying online and do your research before making any payment. A bargain that seems too good to be true probably is.

Shopping online

With wedding season now well upon us, [shopping](#) for the perfect dress, mother of the bride, or guest outfit may lead many to search online for that 'something special'.

[Trading Standards Service NI](#) has received a number of complaints from people who have been left out of pocket by what appear to be UK-based, professional occasion wear stockists.

They have bought items from a website ending in '.co.uk' and having what appeared to be a registered UK business address.

Expecting the glamour and quality depicted by the trader, they were all left dismayed on receiving an ill-fitting reproduction with only a passing resemblance to the clothing advertised.

On attempting to return the item, the traders often refuse to acknowledge the poor quality or provide any redress.

In addition to this, some people have then faced an unexpected customs bill

to import the item from China.

A '.co.uk' website address and a UK geographic address guarantees nothing. A trader can be based anywhere in the world and, as such, will have no intention of giving people their right to a 14 day 'cool-off' period when buying online from UK or EU-based websites.

What to do

What appear to be genuine, professional websites frequently use images taken from other internet suppliers.

If dealing with an unfamiliar website, do a simple Google search of the trader's name and website address along with the word 'review' or 'scam'. This can return any poor or negative reviews left by others who have experienced unsatisfactory service or, worse, been scammed out of their money.

When buying anything online, use a secure method of payment. Using a credit or debit card may provide you with more protection.

Don't pay by money transfer.

If you think you need more advice on this, or on any other consumer-related matter, contact [Consumerline online](#) or on 0300 123 6262.

More useful links

[Taking steps to manage stress better](#)

Experiencing stress is a normal part of everyday life and too much stress doesn't just make you feel bad, it can also be bad for your health. But there are steps to take to help manage it better.

Pressure and stress

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Too much stress can lead to a feeling of being unable to cope.

For example, dealing with changing demands and pressures from different areas in our lives, such as children's needs, money worries, relationships or concerns about work.

If you think you're suffering from [work-related stress](#) you should speak to

your employer.

Common signs of stress include:

- sleeping problems
- sweating
- loss of appetite
- difficulty concentrating

You may feel anxious, irritable, low in self-esteem, have racing thoughts, worry constantly or go over things in your head.

People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to someone else.

Stress is not an illness itself, but it can cause serious illness if it is not addressed.

Sometimes when stress is severe it can lead to burnout, with extreme emotional and physical exhaustion.

Dealing with stress

There are some practical steps you can take to deal with stress:

- learn how to relax: listen to music or go for a walk – taking steps to unwind can help stop stress building up
- eat well: during periods of stress it is more important than ever to eat well, as healthy eating can have a positive effect on your emotional wellbeing
- take regular exercise: being active can really help, so take a stroll, get out with the kids or with friends, or take the dog for a walk
- talk to someone: talking about your feelings can really help identify what is causing the additional stress
- work through your problems: taking steps to deal with your problems will make you better able to cope with them

The key is to take positive action before stress really begins to affect your health and wellbeing.

More useful links