

Article

# Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: 18 to 29 January 2023

Insights from our Winter Survey, examining how cost-of-living rises, and difficulty accessing NHS services are affecting people during the winter months.

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# 1 . Main points

The following points are for the latest Winter Survey period, 18 to 29 January 2023, based on adults in Great Britain.

- Around 1 in 11 (9%) adults reported they had often or sometimes run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past month.
- Around 1 in 8 (13%) reported they had cut down meal size or skipped meals in the past month because there was not enough money for food; 21% of these adults reported they had done so on more than 14 days in the month.
- Of those waiting for NHS treatment; around 7 in 10 (70%) reported it had negatively affected (either strongly or slightly) their life and around 2 in 10 (18%) reported an appointment had been cancelled or delayed in the past month.
- Around 6 in 10 (58%) adults who had sought a GP practice appointment received one within a week, 16% within one to two weeks, 8% within two to three weeks, and 5% more than three weeks.
- Around a third (34%) agreed (strongly agreed or agreed) that increases in the cost of living had negatively affected their mental health.

The following points cover adults who took part in our Winter Survey in both November to December 2022 and January 2023.

- Around 2 in 10 adults (19% in the latest period, 23% in the previous period) reported that they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never, able to keep comfortably warm in the past two weeks; 12% had reported this in both the latest and the previous period (22 November to 18 December 2022), and 7% reported this for the first time in the latest period.
- Around half of adults reported that in the past two weeks they were buying less when food shopping (50% in the latest period, 49% in the previous period); 40% reported this in both the latest and the previous period, and 10% reported this for the first time in the latest period.

## 2 . Overview of the impact of winter pressures

This is the fourth in a series of publications reporting findings from our new Winter Survey, including new insights into the experiences of adults this winter.

For the first time, this analysis tracks the experiences in January 2023 of the same adults in Great Britain who took part in the previous November and December Winter Survey, allowing us to examine any individual-level changes experienced by these adults.

Estimates in this publication are based on data collected in the period from 18 to 29 January 2023 (the "latest period") and 22 November to 18 December 2022 (the "previous period").

This article provides an update to our [The impact of winter pressures on different population groups in Great Britain: 22 November to 18 December 2022 article](#).

Breakdowns of all estimates by age, sex, country, employment status and level of deprivation of the area in which respondents live (based on the [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#)), including [confidence intervals](#) for the estimates, are contained in the associated datasets. Where comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the [statistical significance](#) of any differences.

## 3 . Food insecurity

Despite inflationary pressures easing somewhat in January 2023, as explained in our [Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2023 bulletin](#), pressures on cost of living such as food and energy prices remain.

Food insecurity refers to the inability of households to acquire enough food to lead a healthy life. With the [annual rate of food and non-alcoholic beverages inflation standing at 16.7% to January 2023](#) our analysis explores people's experience related to this.

### Changes over time in ability to afford food

Among adults who took part in both periods of the survey, around 1 in 20 (5% in both the latest and previous period) reported that in the past two weeks they or their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more.

The 5% of adults who reported this in the latest period were made up of:

- 3% who had reported this in both the latest and in the previous period
- 2% who reported this in the latest period, but in the previous period had reported they or their household had not experienced this

A larger proportion of adults reported that in the past two weeks they were buying less when food shopping, with around half of adults reporting this in both periods (50% in the latest period and 49% in the previous period). In the latest period this was made up of:

- 40% who reported this in both the latest period and in the previous period
- 9% who reported they were buying less in the latest period but had reported their shopping habits had not changed in the previous period
- 1% who reported they were buying less in the latest period but had reported they were buying more in the previous period (Figure 1)

### Figure 1: Changes over time in buying more or less when food shopping

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 22 November to 18 December 2022 and 18 to 29 January 2023

#### Notes:

1. Question: "In the past two weeks, which, if any, have you been doing when food shopping?"
2. Base: All adults who took part in both the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey during 22 November to 18 December 2022 and Winter Survey during 18 to 29 January 2023.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding and that some proportions of less than 1% are not shown on this chart.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

## Experiences of food insecurity

For the first time, we used the six-item module of the [United States Department of Agriculture's \(USDA\) food security survey \(PDF, 214KB\)](#) to help us explore experiences of food insecurity among adults in Great Britain in more detail.

Considering the experience in the past month among all adults who took part in the latest period:

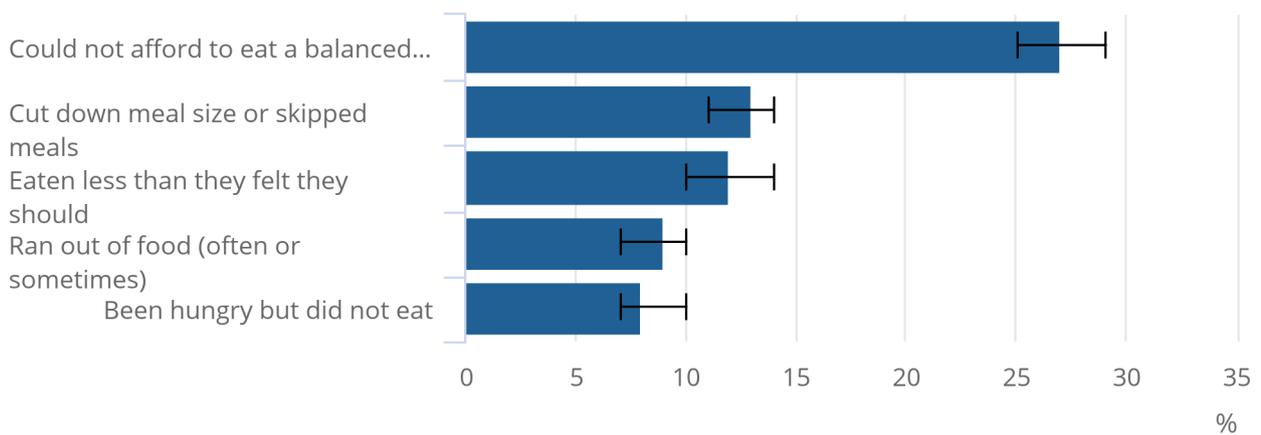
- 27% reported they often or sometimes could not afford to eat a balanced diet
- 3% reported they had cut down meal size or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food – 21% of these adults reported they had done so on more than 14 days in the past month
- 12% reported they had eaten less than they felt they should because there was not enough money for food
- 9% of adults reported they had often or sometimes run out of food and could not afford to buy more
- 8% reported they had been hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food (Figure 2)

**Figure 2: Around a quarter of adults (27%) reported they often or sometimes could not afford to eat a balanced diet**

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 18 to 29 January 2023

Figure 2: Around a quarter of adults (27%) reported they often or sometimes could not afford to eat a balanced diet

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 18 to 29 January 2023



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Winter Survey (WS)

Notes:

1. Questions "In the past month, how regularly have you or your household not been able to afford to eat balanced meals?", "In the past month, did you or other adults in your household ever cut down the size of your meals or skip meals because there was not enough money for food?", "In the past month, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there was not enough money for food?", "In the past month, how regularly have you or your household run out of food and could not afford to get more?" and "In the past month, were you ever hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food?".
2. Base: All adults.
3. Please note upper and lower confidence limits (UCL and LCL) on figures throughout this article may appear to be asymmetrical due to rounding.

## 4 . Energy insecurity

Energy insecurity is the inability of a household to meet its basic energy needs, such as heating their homes or having a warm bath. This has likely been affected as gas prices rose 129.4% in the year to January 2023, as shown in our [Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2023 release](#).

### Changes over time in not being able to keep comfortably warm

Around 2 in 10 adults who took part in both periods of the survey (19% in the latest period and 22% in the previous period) reported that they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never, able to keep comfortably warm in the past two weeks.

In the latest period, this was made up of:

- 12% who reported this in both the latest and previous period
- 6% who reported they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never, able to keep comfortably warm in the latest period but had reported they were sometimes able to keep comfortably warm in the previous period
- 1% who reported they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never, able to keep comfortably warm in the latest period but had reported they were always or often able to keep comfortably warm in the previous period (Figure 3)

There are strong seasonal spending patterns relating to gas and electricity that may affect these results. For more information on this and recent price rises for gas and electricity, please see our latest [Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2023 release](#).

### Figure 3: Changes over time in being able to keep comfortably warm

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 22 November to 18 December 2022 and 18 to 29 January 2023

#### Notes:

1. Question: "In the past two weeks, how often were you able to keep comfortably warm in your home?"
2. Base: All adults who took part in both the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey during 22 November to 18 December 2022 and Winter Survey during 18 to 29 January 2023.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding or that the response of individuals who answered don't know, or prefer not to say in either period or did not answer the question in both periods are not shown on this chart.

#### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

More information on the characteristics of those most likely to be vulnerable to the impacts of increases in the cost of living and the actions adults are taking as a result is available in our articles: [Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023](#) and [Characteristics of adults experiencing energy and food insecurity in Great Britain: 22 November to 18 December 2022](#).

## 5 . NHS waiting lists

## Changes over time in NHS waiting lists

Around 2 in 10 adults who took part in both periods of the survey (22% in the latest period and 21% in the previous period) reported that they were waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment (NHS treatment) through the NHS.

Around 1 in 20 (6%) had reported waiting for NHS treatment in the previous period and were no longer waiting in the latest period. A similar proportion (6%) had not reported waiting for NHS treatment in the previous period but were now waiting for NHS treatment in the latest period (Figure 4).

### Figure 4: Changes over time in whether on an NHS waiting list

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 22 November to 18 December 2022 and 18 to 29 January 2023

#### Notes:

1. Question: "Are you currently waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS?".
2. Base: All adults who took part in both the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey during 22 November to 18 December 2022 and Winter Survey during 18 to 29 January 2023.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding and that proportions of less than 1% are not shown on this chart.

#### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Please note, our estimates are based on data reported by adult respondents who took part in the survey and may therefore differ from the actual number of people who are currently on an NHS waiting list. For administrative data on NHS waiting lists, visit [NHS England](#), [NHS Scotland](#) or [NHS Wales](#).

## Experiences of waiting for NHS treatment

For the first time, in the latest period we asked those who reported waiting for NHS treatment if they had had an appointment cancelled or delayed in the past month - around 2 in 10 (18%) reported that they had.

Of those waiting for an NHS appointment in the latest period, 65% reported that they had been waiting for up to six months. Around 12% reported that they had been waiting between 7 and 11 months, and 17% reported that they had been waiting for a year or longer.

In the latest period, 3% of all adults reported that they had paid for a private medical appointment, test or treatment in the past month because they felt that the wait for the NHS was too long. A further 3% reported they had private insurance that had paid for some or all of their treatment.

## Impacts of waiting for NHS treatment

Of adults who reported waiting for NHS treatment, around 7 in 10 (70%) reported the wait had a negative impact on their life. This was made up of:

- around a quarter (23%) of adults who reported that the wait has had a strong negative impact on their life
- over 4 in 10 (46%) who reported it has had a slight negative impact

The most frequent types of impact reported by those adults who reported a negative impact were:

- well-being affected by, for example, boredom, loneliness, anxiety or stress (57%)
- reduced ability to exercise (40%)
- condition being made worse (38%)
- mobility affected (36%)

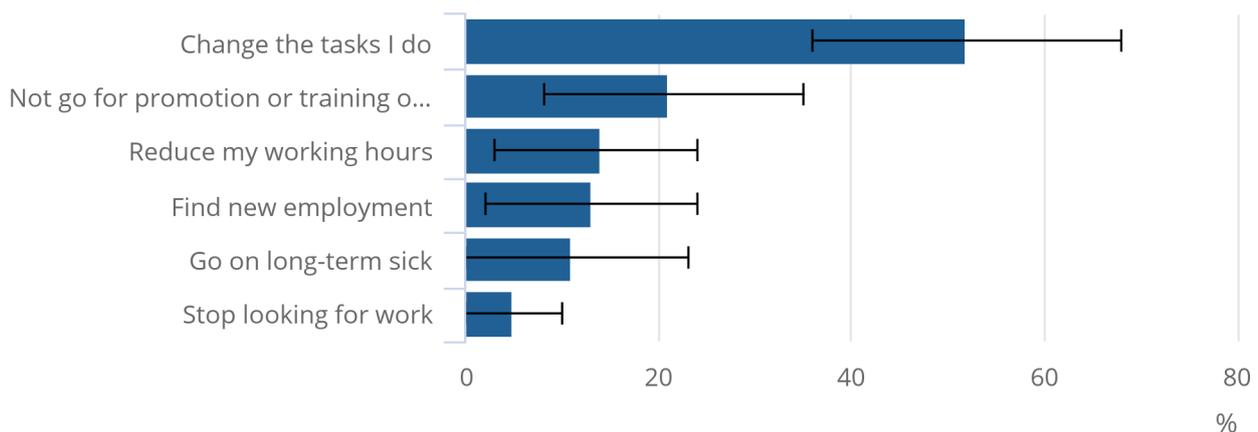
Around 3 in 10 (31%) employed or self-employed adults reported that waiting for NHS treatment had affected their work. The ways these adults reported their work had been affected are shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Around half (52%) of employed or self-employed adults whose work was negatively affected by waiting for NHS treatment reported they had changed the tasks they did at work**

Proportion among employed or self-employed adults who reported that waiting for NHS treatment had had a negative impact on their lives and that their work was being affected, Great Britain, 18 to 29 January 2023

### Figure 5: Around half (52%) of employed or self-employed adults whose work was negatively affected by waiting for NHS treatment reported they had changed the tasks they did at work

Proportion among employed or self-employed adults who reported that waiting for NHS treatment had had a negative impact on their lives and that their work was being affected, Great Britain, 18 to 29 January 2023



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Winter Survey (WS)

**Notes:**

1. Question: "In which ways, if any, has your work been affected by waiting for NHS treatment?"
2. Base: Adults who reported waiting for NHS treatment had negatively impacted their lives and that their work was being affected.
3. Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Estimates for the categories "Other", "Stop working and get illness-related benefits", "Stop working altogether without getting illness-related benefits" and "Retire earlier than planned" are not shown in this chart. See our dataset for further breakdowns and all response options.

## Experiences of waiting for GP practice appointments

We also asked respondents about their experiences accessing a GP practice.

Of adults who had tried to make a GP practice appointment (that is, with a General Practitioner Medical Doctor, a Practice Nurse or other member of the practice team), in the latest period around a third (36%) reported it was easy, or very easy, to make an appointment, while around half (46%) reported it being difficult or very difficult.

Around 6 in 10 (58%) of these adults reported that they had received a GP practice appointment within a week, 16% within one to two weeks, 8% within two to three weeks and 5%, more than three weeks.

When asked about their experience in their last attempt to make a GP appointment, adults reported:

- difficulty contacting the GP practice (33%)
- being offered only a telephone consultation when they wanted a face-to-face appointment (32%)
- waiting too long for a GP appointment (31%)
- not being able to get an appointment (21%)

Around 2 in 10 (21%) adults reported they had needed to contact their GP practice in the past month but had decided not to. Of these adults, around 6 in 10 (59%) reported this was because they thought the wait for an appointment would be too long. Around a quarter reported it was because they were worried about the burden on the NHS (26%), they could not contact their GP practice at the times required (26%), or they thought they would not be able to get an appointment at a suitable time (24%).

## 6 . Impacts of winter pressures on physical and mental health

We sought to better understand the impact that the cost of living, NHS waiting lists, GP access and other pressures are having on the public's health and well-being.

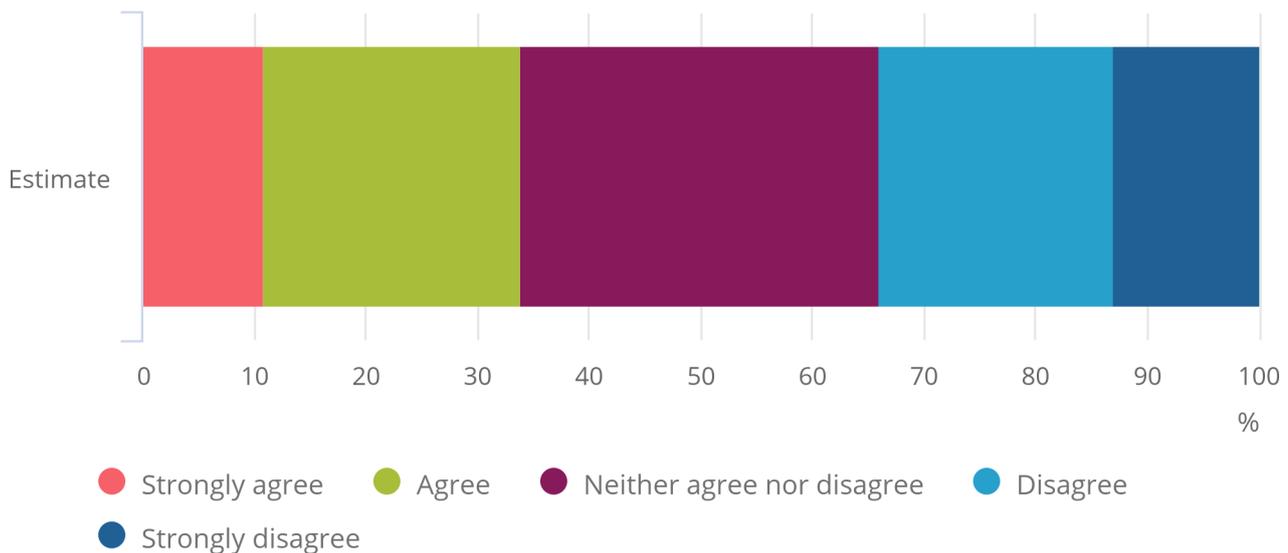
Around a third (34%) of respondents agreed (strongly agreed or agreed) that increases in the cost of living had negatively affected their mental health (Figure 6).

### Figure 6: Around a third (34%) of adults reported increases in the cost of living had negatively impacted their mental health

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 18 to 29 January 2023

Figure 6: Around a third (34%) of adults reported increases in the cost of living had negatively impacted their mental health

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 18 to 29 January 2023



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Winter Survey (WS)

#### Notes:

1. Question: Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'In the past two weeks, the increased cost of living has negatively affected my mental health'".
2. Base: All adults.

The most common things adults reported negatively affected their mental or physical health in the past month were:

- not being able to afford to heat my home or having to cut back on energy use (27% reported this affected their mental health, 20% reported this affected their physical health)
- waiting too long for a GP appointment (15%, their mental health, 14%, their physical health)
- waiting too long for a hospital appointment or treatment (14%, their mental health, 12%, their physical health)
- not being able to afford enough food (14%, their mental health, 7%, their physical health)
- not being able to afford gas or electricity to cook, or heat, meals (10%, their mental health, 13%, their physical health)

## 7 . Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain data

[Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: impacts of the cost of living on behaviours and health](#)

Dataset | Released 27 February 2023

Indicators from the Winter Survey related to the impact of the cost of living on health and health behaviours.

[Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: GP practice access](#)

Dataset | Released 27 February 2023

Indicators from the Winter Survey related to access to GPs, barriers experienced while making GP appointments, and actions taken when faced with those barriers.

[Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: NHS waiting lists](#)

Dataset | Released 27 February 2023

Indicators from the Winter Survey related to NHS waiting lists, and the wider impacts of being on an NHS waiting list.

[Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: longitudinal analysis](#)

Dataset | Released 27 February 2023

Key indicators of the impact of winter pressures from the Winter Survey. Tracking the responses of the same participants to the Winter Survey over time.

## 8 . Data sources and quality

This release contains data and indicators from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Winter Survey, a survey being undertaken using participants who had previously taken part in the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

Breakdowns by age, sex, country, employment status and by the level of deprivation of the area in which they live, based on the [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\)](#), including confidence intervals for the estimates, are contained in the datasets published with this article. For information on confidence intervals, see our [Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys article](#).

Where differences between different demographic groups are presented in this bulletin, or comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the statistical significance of the differences. For information on statistical significance, see our [Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys article](#).

## Sampling and weighting

In the latest wave (period 18 to 29 January 2023) we sampled 4,053 individuals who took part in either the first (22 November to 4 December 2022), or second (period 7 to 18 December 2022) wave of the Winter Survey. The responding sample for this period contained 2,990 individuals, representing a 74% response rate.

The sample for the first two waves of the Winter Survey was randomly selected from those who had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS) or OPN survey and was undertaken as a module of the OPN survey.

Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population (based on ONS population estimates). Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

## 9 . Related links

### [Characteristics associated with experiencing energy and food insecurity among adults in Great Britain: 22 November to 18 December 2022](#)

Article | Released 13 February 2023

Logistic regression analysis to understand the characteristics associated with experiencing energy and food insecurity.

### [The impact of winter pressures on different population groups in Great Britain: 22 November to 18 December 2022](#)

Article | Released 30 January 2023

In-depth analysis on how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services are impacting people's lives during the autumn and winter months.

### [The impact of winter pressures on adults in Great Britain: December 2022](#)

Article | Released 15 December 2022

First insights from our new winter survey providing monthly updates on how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services are impacting people's lives during the autumn and winter months.

### [Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023](#)

Article | Released 20 February 2023

Analysis of the proportion of the population that are affected by an increase in their cost of living and of the characteristics associated with financial vulnerability, using data from the Opinions and Lifestyle survey.

### [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 8 to 19 February 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 February 2023

Social insights on daily life and events, including the cost of living, working arrangements and well-being from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

### [Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 15 February 2023

Price indices, percentage changes, and weights for the different measures of consumer price inflation.

### [The cost of living, current and upcoming work: February 2023](#)

Article | Released 8 February 2023

A summary of ONS's current and future analytical work related to the cost of living.

## 10 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 27 February 2023, ONS website, article, [Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: 18 to 29 January 2023](#)