

Living Conditions 1750-1900

What were living conditions like 1750-1900?

Pollution: Air pollution was bad because of coal-burning steam engines in factories and workshops. Coal was also used for heating houses and for cooking.

Overcrowding: So many people moved to the towns that there were not enough houses. New houses were quickly built but they tried to crowd as many houses in as possible. Whole families would live in a single room. Almost half of workers' houses had 3 or more people per bed. Cellars were the worst places to live. Overcrowding meant diseases could spread very easily.

Damp: Houses for the poor were often badly built from the cheapest materials (earth floors, single brick walls). The houses were damp.

Poor ventilation: As the houses were built so close together it was difficult to get fresh air or light into the rooms.

Rubbish: In many towns there was no effective system for collecting rubbish. There were piles of rotting rubbish in courtyards and streets attracting rats and causing diseases.

Sewage: Most houses were built without sewers or toilets. The houses shared a privy (built over a stream or more often a cesspit). Many cesspits were not lined so the sewage could seep into the water supply. The cesspits could also overflow. They stank and were a breeding ground for disease.

Drinking water: Most houses did not have piped water so people had to get their water from cisterns, standpipes, wells or streams. The waste of the town polluted all of these. This meant that water-carried diseases like cholera could easily spread.

Cleanliness/hygiene: As it was hard to get water, people found it difficult to wash themselves, their clothing, their bedding and their cooking things. Many people had body lice. It was also difficult to store food. These were ideal conditions for killer diseases like typhus, typhoid and diarrhoea to flourish.

What diseases resulted from poor living conditions?

<u>Disease</u>	<u>Details</u>
Tuberculosis	This disease was also called TB or consumption. It attacked the lungs and victims would cough up blood, lose weight, get a fever. It could kill. Germs were passed when people coughed or sneezed. 1/10 th of 19 th Century people had TB.
Smallpox	A rash turned into huge pus filled blisters all over the body. Left deep scars. It could attack and kill people of all ages. Germs were passed by coughing, sneezing or touching.
Cholera	Cholera is the Greek word for diarrhoea. As the diarrhoea got worse the victim would dehydrate and die. There were cholera epidemics e.g. in 1848, 62 000 people died from cholera. It was caused by a germ that contaminated water. Anyone who drank the water would die – often within 24 hours.
Typhoid	Victims got headaches, fever, constipation then terrible diarrhoea. Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's husband) died of typhoid. It was caused by a germ living in urine or poo and sometimes this contaminated water or food. Flies could carry this killer disease too.

Edwin **Chadwick** investigated living conditions in Britain. He wrote a report in 1842 about what he had found out. His report shocked people and helped bring about improvements in standards of health, but this took time.



1848 Public Health Act – local town councils could spend money on cleaning up their towns if they wanted to. Some towns e.g. Birmingham and Liverpool made huge improvements but many towns didn't bother doing anything.



Britain's scariest disease was **cholera**. In 1854, **Dr John Snow** investigated one area of London to find out what was causing cholera. He worked out that all the victims in this area had got their water from the Broad Street water pump. When Dr Snow removed the handle of the water pump, people were forced to get their water elsewhere and there were no more deaths. A street toilet (one metre from the water pump) had a cracked lining and this allowed filthy water to trickle into the drinking water.



The new evidence about cholera convinced the government that they had to clean things up. They asked Joseph Bazalgette (the Sewer King) to build underground tunnels (or **sewers**) to collect waste in London. By 1866, there were 83 miles of sewers... and cholera never returned to London again.



How did the Government clean up the towns?

Many other new health measures were introduced:

1. **1866 Sanitary Act** – Towns had to install proper water supply and sewers.
2. **1875 Housing Act** – Town councils could pull down worst houses and build better homes.
3. **1875 Public Health Act** – Local councils had to keep streets and pavements clear and clean. They could increase taxes to pay for this.



In 1801, the average person in a British town could expect to live to age 30. By 1901, they would, on average, live to 50.