

Common Basement Problems

There are two main types of basement problems - wall problems and water problems.

1. Cracked, bowed or tipped walls

Many homes suffer from inward movement of walls caused by soil pressure. Symptoms can range from step cracks, vertical shears and horizontal cracks, to the wall actually sliding in at lower sections. Soil pressure can push a block wall off it's footings. Without proper drainage, water gathers in the soil surrounding the foundation walls, often finding it's way into the basement. Pressure can build slowly over years, particularly during the freeze/thaw cycle. Soil pressure can tip foundation walls inward, cracking the mortar joints. It is generally recommended that any wall displaced more than 1" from the original wall construction be excavated and pushed back. If the wall is excavated, in most cases, it must also be braced on the inside to prevent new movement. It is also a good idea, once the excavated wall has been repaired, and before it is backfilled, to repair, replace or install a drainage system. Walls displaced less than 1" can typically be braced from the inside with steel reinforcement beams.

If water problems go unchecked, the seasonal expansion and contraction of the soil can cause damage on the foundation wall. This can sometimes cause severe displacement. Excavation and/or reinforcements can be an expensive repair. We recommend calling a structural engineer or an independent basement consultant to perform an unbiased analysis of your basement.

Common signs of cracked, bowed or tipped walls are: cracks that are wider at the top than at the bottom, floors that are not level and doors, cabinets and windows that do not shut properly. In extreme cases, cracking in the upstairs plaster and/or drywall, cracking in exterior brickwork and/or caulking and leaning of outside chimneys or porches can occur.



2. Leaky basements

Seepage at the cove (where the floor meets the wall), combined with wet bottom courses of blocks, are common symptoms of efflorescence, a sign of water seepage. Wet spots on higher areas of the wall, as well as in the corners, are also symptoms.

Common signs of a leaky basement are: seepage through floor cracks and seepage at the cove.

