

What causes drummy tiles?



There could be different causes for tiles to become loose, sound drummy or lift altogether over time. These may be related to structural issues with your property, poor workmanship or to other events. Most often drummy tiles are caused by poor tile fitting, structural problems of the floor, or even using the tiled area too early.

Poor tile fitting expertise

Laying tiles may seem simple enough. You watch a how-to video and rush to have a go at installing your kitchen floor. Unfortunately, even if you entrust the job to professional tilers, they may lack the high level of expertise needed for the substrate installation and preparation, as well as for the tile laying task itself. So, in reality, a functional tiling system with a long lifespan may not be the desired result if one or more of the following malpractices have occurred during the fitting process:

- The tiler has used the wrong adhesive product and this has compromised the quality of the bond;
- An insufficient quantity of a fixative material has been applied, resulting in void spaces and a weakened tiling system;
- The technician has waited a bit too long before laying the tiles over the glue and this, again, has produced unsatisfactory results, regarding the strength of the bond;
- The tiler has not prepared the substrate layer correctly (it was not cleaned properly or left to cure for long enough);
- Wrong sized grout joints have been used, affecting tile movement (expansion/contraction);
- Incorrect installation of movement/expansion joint profiles, which has compromised the strength of the entire system during movement;

- Lack of expansion joints installation, resulting in failure to control/minimise tile movement;
- Thermal exposure – temperature fluctuation is also closely related to tile movement and its control or lack of (tile growth and contraction need to be managed via correctly fitted expansion joint profiles).

Structural reasons

Although rarely the culprits behind the presence of loose tiles, occasionally problems with the structure of your home or old tiling system may be to blame for your faulty tiled floor or bathroom wall.

- **Termite infestation**
Your timber subfloor or wall frame structure has been infested and thus, weakened by some type of wood-boring insects, including termites;
- **Moisture exposure**
Leaks, flooding, wet weather conditions (exterior tile surfaces), steam/humidity exposure (bathroom surfaces) can be the reasons for your tiles to debond over time and become drummy;
- **Tile over tile**
Naturally, if you lay tiles over tiles and the old ones are drummy, areas of the new surface will carry on making the same hollow sound.

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Other reasons

Some of those can be avoided by using common sense and others – by envisaging them during the installation process:

- **Using the newly fitted floor too soon**
Walking on the tiles too soon after installation will jeopardise the bond;
- **Manufacturing faults**
Imperfections with the tiles, especially if they are not rectified edge tiles, may eventually result in “drumminess”, due to tiles not fitting perfectly and debonding in areas over time;
- **Cleaning methods**
Some types of tiles, if not sealed, can debond and become loose if exposed to harsh cleaning products or high-pressure washing methods.