

# Employment Support Allowance (ESA)

## Information on the Work Capability Assessment

Usually, when you have made your initial claim for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and completed the ESA50 form you will be asked to go to a **medical assessment**.

This factsheet explains how to prepare for the assessment and what to expect when you are there

### Arranging the assessment and getting there on the day

After you have claimed Employment Support Allowance, you will be asked to go for a face to face medical assessment. This is known formally as a **Work Capability Assessment**. The assessments are run by the Health Assessment Advisory Service who will contact you to arrange your assessment.

They can be contacted by:

- phone **0800 288 8777** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
- email **customer-relations@chdauk.co.uk**

The assessment takes place at an assessment centre, but if you have an illness or impairment that makes it difficult to travel to the assessment centre, you can ask for it to take place at home.

If you spend money on traveling to an assessment centre you can claim those costs back. Just make sure you bring the details of your travel costs with you to the assessment. This includes things like train or bus tickets, or details of how many miles you have driven in the car.

You can claim 25p per mile if you have come **by car**, plus parking costs (**make sure you keep the parking ticket**).

If you can only travel **by taxi** you need to telephone the assessment centre to let them know.

### Planning for your assessment

The medical assessor will be checking how your disability affects your ability to work. Think about how your illness or disability affects you on bad days. A lot of this information will have been written on your ESA50 form when you first applied for ESA, but before the assessment, it is a good idea to remind yourself of:

- the kind of things you have difficulty with, or can't do at all (e.g. walking up steps without help or remembering to go to appointments)
- what a usual day is like for you and how your condition affects you from day to day
- what a bad day is like for you

If it is helpful, you can write a list of things that you find difficult and take this with you on the day of your assessment.

## What to take with you

You'll need to take identification with you to your assessment. A passport is usually best.

If you don't have a passport, you need to take along 2 different types of identification, such as:

- your birth certificate
- your full driving licence
- a recent bank statement that shows your name and address
- a gas or electricity bill.

You should also have with you:

- any pills or medication you need
- any aids and appliances that you use (e.g. glasses, hearing aids or walking stick)

If you made and kept a copy of your ESA50 form, you can take this into the assessment if you want to. This will help make sure you don't miss anything out when you're telling the assessor about your condition).

## Who can come with you

You can bring a friend, family member or support worker with you on the day of your assessment. They can also come into the room for the actual assessment if you want them to.

The assessor will be asking you the questions, but it is your right to have support from a friend or family member if you are finding it difficult to answer questions. They can tell the assessor things for you if you are struggling.

Be clear in the assessment why you need their support.

## What happens at your medical assessment

During the assessment, a healthcare professional will check how your illness or disability affects your ability to work. They use the information you've given on your ESA50 form and also draw opinions and make assumptions from what you do on the day.

For example, they might ask you how you got to the assessment centre. If you say you came on the bus, they'll make a note that you can travel alone on public transport.

If you say you go shopping in a supermarket they may assume you can walk around the supermarket, unless you make it clear that you can't or need help.

You may be asked how long you've been sitting in the waiting room before the assessment. If you say 'half an hour', they'll make a note that you can sit on an ordinary chair for at least 30 minutes. In this example, it may be helpful to give more information if relevant; e.g. that you waited for half an hour but had to walk around because you couldn't sit for that long.

You might also be asked to carry out some physical tasks during the assessment. The assessor might also examine you in a similar way that a doctor would.

Don't feel that you have to do things during the assessment, or say you can do things on the day of the assessment that you wouldn't otherwise be able to do. If you cannot do something comfortably, make that clear.

The assessor will talk to you about the things you've said on your ESA50 form. You'll be able to check back to the answers you gave on the form if you've taken your copy with you. You can explain these again to the assessor and you can also give other examples of things you find difficult.

The assessor (who will be a healthcare professional) will be trying to find out whether you score enough points under the ESA criteria, known as 'descriptors', to qualify for ESA.

Mencap have a separate factsheet with a list of all the criteria and points available for each one. You need to score a total of **15 or more** points to be awarded ESA. It is important that you look at these descriptors before your assessment and work out which criteria apply to you – this is what the assessor will be working from.

Their questions will be based on the criteria.

This is an example of a question that you may be asked at the assessment, and how points can be scored:

## Activity 11: Learning tasks

- (a) Cannot learn how to complete a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock **(15 Points)**
- (b) Cannot learn anything beyond a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock. **(9 Points)**
- (c) Cannot learn anything beyond a moderately complex task, such as the steps involved in operating a washing machine to clean clothes. **(6 Points)**
- (d) None of the above apply. **(0 Points)**

## Tips for your medical assessment

### **Do:**

- tell the assessor everything you can that's relevant to your illness, health condition or disability, even if it's already on your form
- back up what you've said on the ESA50 form with any evidence you can, like a doctor's letter or examples of things that have happened to you
- ask for any help you need it (it can make the assessment less stressful). This includes having a friend, relative or supporter helping you answer questions if you find it difficult.

### **Don't:**

- exaggerate your condition(s)
- feel you have to do anything you normally wouldn't be able to do
- expect the assessor to be 'on your side' – they are there to ask questions, not to make sure you get ESA

The assessor doesn't make the decision about your ESA - they make a recommendation to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) after your assessment. They won't be able to tell you what they're going to recommend at your assessment.

You can get a copy of your assessment report by asking the DWP office that's looking after your claim. The phone number will be on any letters you've had from them about your ESA claim.

After your assessment, a decision maker from the DWP will look at the recommendation made by the assessor and use this to decide if you can get ESA.

