

Preparing for welfare benefits assessments

- tips for brain injury survivors



This publication is part of Headway's *welfare benefits after brain injury* series. To browse through our publications on a range of issues relating to brain injury and download these free-of-charge, visit www.headway.org.uk/information-library.

Introduction

Completing assessments is part of the application process for many types of welfare benefits. The assessment offers a chance for applicants to explain how their condition affects them and why they might be eligible for the financial support provided by the benefit in question.

For many brain injury survivors, the process of applying for benefits can feel daunting, especially the idea of attending an assessment. However, preparing for the assessment and making arrangements in advance can take some of the pressure away.

It is also important to remember that the assessment is not a test. It is an opportunity for you to give more information, evidence, and examples of how your brain injury has affected your life so that you can access support that you are entitled to.

This publication is written to offer guidance to brain injury survivors on preparing for a welfare benefits assessment. Most of the information in this publication relates to face-to-face assessments, but you might be offered a video or telephone call assessment instead; many of the tips below will still be relevant.

Rules for welfare benefits change regularly. You should always check the latest guidance at www.gov.uk/browse/benefits.

Tips for coping with the assessment

Before the assessment

- Your letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will contain

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details of the location of your assessment. **Check on a map in advance where this is.** If you feel that it will be too difficult or impossible for you to travel to the location, get in touch with the department and request a home-based assessment instead. You might need to provide evidence such as a letter from a GP for this request.

- Contact the assessment centre to **ask about their accessibility.** This can include checking where toilets are located and whether the building has lifts if your assessment will not be based on a ground floor. If you think you may struggle with accessing the centre, tell them, as you may be offered an assessment at a different location or your home instead.
- If you think you may struggle with attending your appointment on the date provided, you can **contact the assessment centre to reschedule** – however, be mindful that you can only reschedule once.
- Think about **how long it will take you to travel** to the assessment and whether you can aim to arrive earlier than your appointed time in case of traffic.
- Arrange for a family member, close friend or someone else who knows you well and understands your brain injury to **attend your assessment with you** as your companion. This does not necessarily have to be someone related to you. Your companion should be someone who can emotionally support you and help you to explain your brain injury to the assessors.
- Ask in advance about any **travelling costs** you may be able to have reimbursed, either for yourself or for anyone accompanying you.
- Take some time to **go over your application form** and make a note of any additional points you want to discuss during your assessment.
- Some people find it useful to **request an audio recording** of their

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assessment as it can form evidence if needed later for an appeal. If you intend to do this, contact the centre before your assessment date to make your request.

- You might be required to wait a while for your assessment after arriving at the centre. If you are concerned that waiting might make you anxious or uncomfortable (for instance if there are bright lights, loud noises, a busy environment) **ask in advance** whether there is a quiet, separate room that you can wait in.

During the assessment

- Take a copy of your completed application form along with you, as well as copies of **any other medical evidence** that might help with your claim. These will be helpful to refer to throughout the assessment to make sure that you do not forget to discuss any key details.
- The assessor will be a healthcare professional, but they might not specialise in brain injury. Don't be afraid to **tell them about brain injury** and how it has personally affected you, especially about the 'hidden' effects that may not be visible to them.
- You might not always be asked about things in an obvious way. It may be that you enter into what you believe to be an ordinary conversation including questions such as:
 - How did you get here today?
 - How do you normally spend your day?
 - What kind of things do you have/cook for dinner?

These questions are not conversations but form part of your assessment, so **consider your answers carefully.**

- Avoid simply saying whether you 'can' or 'can't' do something. Instead, discuss **how safely and independently** you can do a task, whether you complete it, how long it typically takes you and how you feel during/ afterwards. For instance, you may feel able to sit in front of a computer

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screen to work for a few hours, but does this leave you with headaches and fatigue afterwards? Or you may be able to cook a meal, but do you forget to switch the cooker off when you're done? Share personal examples of times when things have been problematic or gone wrong for you.

- **Take your time** with answering the assessor, do not feel rushed by them to answer quickly. If you have difficulties with processing information or concentration, explain this to your assessor at the beginning of your assessment.
- Ask the assessor to **repeat a question** if your problems with memory, attention, concentration, or fatigue cause you to forget what they have asked. Explain that this is an effect of your brain injury.
- If at any point you are asked to carry out activities (for instance walking a certain distance) that you think may cause you discomfort or pain, tell the assessor and **do not feel pressured** to do it. If you carry out the activity, your assessor may assume you can always do it with no difficulty.
- If you have problems with **managing your anger** and think the assessment situation may cause you to feel angry, tell your assessor at the beginning of your assessment so that they are aware of this, and explain that it is an effect of brain injury. You might also wish to read the tips in our publication [*Managing anger after brain injury*](#) to have some coping strategies if you feel yourself starting to get angry during your assessment.

The most important thing to remember is to **be honest about the impact of your brain injury**. Offer as much detail as you can, including any effects that fluctuate or details of times when things have gone wrong for you, such as any accidents at home or times you have struggled while being out.

If you are a holder of our Headway Brain Injury Identity Card, consider taking this along with you to the assessment as it might help your assessor or other staff (such as the receptionist) better understand any support you need. For more information on the card, visit www.headway.org.uk/idcard.

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Tips from a brain injury survivor...

*“When I get the date of my assessment, I begin **making detailed notes** to refer to in checklist format to tick off when discussed. As and when I remember something, I add it to my notes.*

*“I try and **gather relevant documents** and refer the assessor to my GP for further documentation. This is my assessment, so I take control of the direction and amount of information I share.*

*“**Detailed notes** include my conditions, how each related symptom impacts on daily life, how I manage my condition on a daily basis, a list of all supports, aids, modifications to my day, daily living, space. And most importantly (very unfortunately) I discuss in great detail, the financial cost/implications of managing my condition, and include one-time costs, ongoing and recurrent and running costs as well as that of equipment, aids, modifications I require but cannot afford.*

*“The assessor needs to be convinced for themselves and the DWP/government that **awarding us benefits is justified**.*

*“I mentally prepare myself for my claim to be rejected knowing that I will put in mandatory reconsideration and tribunal if needed. Knowing that **there are appeal procedures** gives me tremendous peace of mind despite having to deal with a possible battle.”*

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