



Preparing for welfare benefits assessments

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Introduction

When applying for welfare benefits, many people are asked to complete an assessment as part of their application. The assessment is a chance for decision-makers to gather further information upon which to process the claim.

For many brain injury survivors, applying for benefits is stressful and tiring, and the idea of attending an assessment can be daunting. However, it is 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.

Try not to worry about the assessment, and instead try to concentrate on the information you want to get across to the assessor.

It can help to prepare for the assessment in advance and make various arrangements to make the process as comfortable as it can be for you. The tips in this factsheet offer some ways that you can do this.

Tips for coping with the assessment

Before the assessment

- Your letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will contain details of the location of your assessment. If you feel that it will be too difficult or impossible for you to travel to the location, request a home-based assessment instead. You may need to provide evidence such as a letter from a GP for this request.
- If you are a wheelchair user or struggle with mobility, contact the assessment centre to ask about their accessibility. 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.
- You may 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.

- Some people find it useful to request an audio recording of their 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.
- Arrange to bring someone to your assessment with you. This could be particularly useful if you have problems with your memory or insight, as these issues may cause you to forget to discuss important things relevant to your application. It can also be useful to have someone beside you just to offer support and help to keep you calm.
- 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 before your assessment date to go over your completed application form and jot down any additional points you want to discuss during your assessment that you might have forgotten to mention on your application.

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 may not specialise in brain injury. Don't be afraid to tell them about brain injury and how it has affected you, especially about the 'hidden' effects of brain injury that may not be visible to them.
- You may 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 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?
- Take your time with answering the assessor, do not feel rushed by them to answer quickly.
- 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 physical 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 beforehand so that they are aware of this and explain that it is an effect of brain injury. You may also wish to read the tips in the booklet [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 incidents 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 Headway's Brain Injury Identity Card, consider taking this along with you to the assessment as it may help your assessor or other staff (such as the receptionist) better understand any support you need.

For more information, visit www.headway.org.uk/idcard





If you need further assistance with preparing for your assessment, start off by contacting the assessment centre using the details provided in your appointment letter.

You could also contact your nearest Headway group or branch or your local Citizens Advice for help. You may also be able to get help from a benefits advisor. For help with finding a benefits advisor, use the Turn2Us Advisor tool at advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk.

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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