

Claiming Attendance Allowance

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Attendance Allowance is a benefit paid to people aged 65 or over who have an illness or a disability and need help with their personal care to live as normal a life as possible. Normally, you only get Attendance Allowance if you have had needs for at least six months.

About Attendance Allowance

Attendance Allowance is a tax-free, non-means tested benefit. You can claim whether or not you are working, and it is not affected by savings or earnings. You do not have to have made national insurance contributions to claim.

You cannot receive both Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance. Until your 65th birthday you can apply for Disability Living Allowance. On or after your 65th birthday you can apply for Attendance Allowance. Arthritis Care produces a separate factsheet *Claiming Disability Living Allowance*. You can read this at www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Factsheets

Attendance Allowance is available for personal care needs – for example, you may need help with things such as washing, dressing and preparing a meal. You need to satisfy certain day and/or night disability conditions in order to qualify.

- Daytime: you need help with personal care frequently throughout the day (during the middle of the day as well as in the morning and evening) or you need continual supervision to avoid substantial danger to yourself or others (such as, if you are prone to falling).
- Night-time: you need prolonged help or repeated help with personal care; or you need someone to be awake at night to watch over you to avoid substantial danger.

The benefit is paid at different rates depending on how much your arthritis (and any other condition you may have) affects you and is based on the help you need – not the help you actually get. It does not matter if you receive a lot of help or support, or very little. It is up to you how you spend the allowance. However, your local authority may take your allowance into account when assessing whether, or how much, you need to pay towards any care services they provide.

At present Attendance Allowance is a self-assessed benefit – it is up to you to describe how your condition affects you on the claim form. If you need advice filling in the form, you can ask a local advice agency for help.

What you can claim

Attendance Allowance has a care component only (unlike the Disability Living Allowance which also has a mobility component).

- The higher rate (£73.60 per week) is payable if you satisfy both the daytime and the night-time disability tests.

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- The lower rate (£49.30 per week) is payable if you satisfy either the daytime disability test or the night-time test. See above for details.

You can qualify for Attendance Allowance if:

- you submit a completed claim pack; and
- you pass at least one of the disability tests relating to your care needs and have done so for the last six months; and
- you satisfy the age test (you are aged 65 or over); and
- you pass the residence and presence tests (you have the relevant immigration status and normally live in the UK and have been living here for at least 26 of the last 52 weeks).

Filling in the Attendance Allowance form

It is a good idea to get advice on how to fill in your claim form. If you cannot fill in the form yourself tell your local Disability Benefits Centre. You can find out where your nearest centre is by calling the Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 882 200. They have a limited service to help people complete it themselves. Citizens Advice, disability organisations and local Age UK groups also offer free advice and assistance with form filling.

You need to submit your completed form within six weeks of the date you requested it to ensure full backdating if your claim is successful. It is a good idea to fill the form out in pencil first or on a separate piece of paper to avoid mistakes. Answer every question as clearly as you can.

Keep a photocopy of your completed answers so you can refer back to them if necessary. It will make it easier when you need to renew or if you need help to challenge a decision.

The different parts of the form

Throughout the form when you are asked to describe how your arthritis affects you, remember to think about the bad days as well as the average days.

The form asks about how your illness or disabilities affect you and about the help you need to lead a reasonable social, cultural or recreational life. It is in this part that you have to satisfy the decision maker that you have the relevant care needs to satisfy the Attendance Allowance rules. It is important that you explain why you need care. Remember that Attendance Allowance is paid for help with personal care. This includes things such as washing, dressing, getting in and out of bed or going to the toilet, but does not usually include things such as housework or shopping.

The information provided in the next section concentrates on the areas of the form most relevant to people with arthritis. If you are claiming the higher rate of Attendance Allowance, you must satisfy the day and night conditions. The help you need must be in connection with bodily functions. These include taking medication, breathing, eating, drinking, walking, sitting, sleeping, washing, dressing and going to the toilet. If you experience pain or discomfort while carrying out any of these tasks or if you avoid doing something because of the risk or you take a long time to do it, mention this on your form.

If you have depression and need help (such as prompting to get up/go out/take care of yourself), include details about this. Also include needs you have through other health problems or disabilities.

You will also be asked about additional information you may wish to provide. This part of the form gives you the chance to tell the decision maker anything you have not been able to mention anywhere else. Make sure you mention anything that will give your claim a better chance of success. You can also use extra pages but make sure you write your name and national insurance number on each page.

Finally, there is a section for a statement from the person who knows you best. This asks someone who knows you well to comment on how your impairment affects you. You can ask anyone to do this, including a friend, relative, colleague or health professional such as your GP.

It is a good idea to help them do this so that they do not leave out any crucial information. Just because you do not currently have any help does not mean you are not entitled to Attendance Allowance. Your claim is decided on the basis of the care or help you need, not what you receive when you apply. If you are awarded the benefit, it is up to you how you spend it.

Questions

The following information aims to walk you through parts of the form in detail and get you thinking about the issues that affect you before you fill the form in. Most people who fail to be awarded disability benefits do so because they have not provided enough detail about the practical problems they have. It is sometimes helpful to keep a diary for a few days to show how your arthritis affects you, what the problems are and the help you might need to overcome them.

It is also a good idea to ask someone who knows you well to help you fill in the form. The following relates to questions about help you might need during the day and then at night-time.

- **Question 24** asks you about getting in and out of bed. Morning stiffness is a common problem for many people with arthritis – particularly those who have rheumatoid arthritis or polymyalgia rheumatica.

Some questions to consider are:

- Do you feel pain and/or stiffness when you get out of bed in the morning?
- Do you need help to stand?
- Do you feel dizzy when you stand up?
- How long does it take before you can get out of bed?

Mention anything you think is relevant. If you use equipment, such as a hoist to help you get out of bed, make sure you include this on the form. If you have problems getting in and out of bed, it is probable that it will be every day. If this is the case, say so. If your arthritis is variable, remember to fill in the form to show how you are on your bad days. It is also important to mention if you need encouragement to get out of bed, to wash, get dressed and move around because of pain, depression or difficulty with moving.

- **Question 25** covers getting to and using the toilet. If you need help going to the toilet, say so. If you use any special equipment, such as a raised toilet seat, grab rails or a bottom wiper, make sure you put it on the form.
- If you need help taking a bath or shower, include this on the form in the answer to **question 26**. Things you should think about when describing your problems could include:
 - Do you need help getting into or out of the bath or shower?
 - Do you have to use a walk-in shower or are you likely to slip in the bath or shower?
 - Do you have trouble washing your hair?
 - Do you have difficulty squeezing toothpaste, shaving or bending to use the sink?
- **Question 27** asks you about dressing and undressing. Mention any part of the process that causes difficulty and calculate the extra time it takes to get ready. This could include difficulty bending to put on socks or shoes, or if you avoid certain clothes because you struggle with zips, buttons or laces.
- **Question 28** asks about difficulty moving about indoors. You may find you have difficulty getting in and out of a chair, getting into a comfortable position or arranging pillows or cushions. If getting into and out of a chair is difficult because you feel stiff, mention this. You should also think about how long it takes you to stand again after sitting down.

Some questions for people with arthritis to think about are:

- Do you have to hold on to furniture as you move about the house?
- Do you need help to get upstairs?
- List any occasion when you have fallen or stumbled on the stairs.
- If you use a stairlift, do you need help transferring to and from it?

Make sure you mention everything.

- **Question 30** asks about help you might need at mealtimes. Think about any problems carrying your plate to the table, cutting up food, and drinking or feeding yourself.
- **Question 31** covers taking tablets, medicine or other medical treatments. If your fingers are stiff or painful you may have difficulty opening some pill bottles, dealing with injections or applying creams. Mention any side effects of taking your medicines such as dizzy spells or drowsiness. Dizzy spells and blackouts can happen as a side effect of medication or even sometimes because of extreme pain. If this happens to you, make sure you include it.
- **Question 32** is about communication. It is important to describe how much help you need from family or friends. If you find it hard to speak or if people find it hard to understand what you are saying, describe how this affects you. Cover things like: reading labels on medicine bottles; reading newspapers or magazines; needing someone to sign your name for you; reading street names, bus numbers and timetables; or recognising someone in the street. Also mention if reading and replying to your mail is difficult. If you are hard of hearing or use a hearing aid, say how long you have been affected. Describe how often you find it hard to hear the radio or TV, or to catch what someone is saying, especially if more than one person is talking.
- In your answer to **question 34**, you need to explain the help you need from another person at home or when you go out. This can be help with things like social and religious activities, interests and hobbies. Include things you do not do now, but would do if you had the help – perhaps things you used to enjoy or things you would like to be able to do if you had someone to help you.
- **Question 37** asks about the help you need with personal tasks during the night, from another person. If you need help during the night to get in and out of bed because of stiffness or dizzy spells or need help to use the toilet it is important to mention it here. If turning over in bed causes you pain or discomfort and help from someone else could make things easier, mention this as well.

Your application may take several weeks to process, but your benefit will be backdated to the date on your claim form. If you are in any doubt about your eligibility, put in a claim. You have nothing to lose. Sometimes the person making the decision on whether to award you the benefit may need further information. If this is the case they may contact one of your health professionals. If they need still more information, they can arrange for a doctor to visit you to carry out a medical examination. It is a good idea to have with you a family member or friend who knows your condition well when the doctor comes.

If your claim is unsuccessful, you can appeal. See Arthritis Care's factsheet, *If you are unhappy with the decision regarding your benefit*, for more information at www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Factsheets

Other benefits

Receiving Attendance Allowance does not affect your eligibility for other benefits. It may entitle you to extra money such as the disability premiums on means-tested benefits in recognition of the extra costs of disability. However, if someone is paid Carer's Allowance to look after you, it may affect your eligibility for this disability premium. It is best to ring the Benefit Enquiry Line to seek advice on your situation.

Further help

If you need further information about what you might be entitled to and how to fill in a claim form, you can call the free Benefit Enquiry Line. The person you speak to will not have your personal papers but will be able to give you some general advice which must not be taken as a decision. Local disability or Age UK groups often have a benefits adviser.

Sources of information

- Arthritis Care factsheets – www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Factsheets
- Benefits Enquiry Line – 0800 882 200 or 0800 220 674 (Northern Ireland)
- Citizens Advice – www.adviceguide.org.uk
- Directgov (England, Wales and Scotland) – www.direct.gov.uk
- Disability Alliance factsheets – www.disabilityalliance.org/fact.htm
- nidirect (Northern Ireland) – www.nidirect.gov.uk

Where can I get more information and support?

Arthritis Care is the UK's largest charity working with and for all people who have arthritis.

- Talk to someone in confidence about your arthritis by contacting our free helplines:

**0808 800 4050 (10am-4pm weekdays)
or Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk**

- Our website has information and discussion forums where you can find support from others with arthritis:

www.arthritiscare.org.uk

- Make a contribution to our work by donating:

020 7380 6540 or online

Our information is regularly reviewed.

This factsheet was last reviewed in 2011. It will be next reviewed in 2012.

Note

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Arthritis Care across the UK

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