

# Employment and Support Allowance

Help if you are ill or  
disabled

This leaflet is no longer current.  
You can find up to date information on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

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## About Employment and Support Allowance

Employment and Support Allowance helps people with an illness or disability to move into work. It has replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid because of an illness or disability.

There are 2 types of Employment and Support Allowance:

- **Contribution-based** - we pay this if you have enough National Insurance contributions. This benefit is taxable.
- **Income-related** - we pay this if you don't have enough money or savings. This benefit is not taxable.

While you're getting the allowance, you'll be able to get help from a specially trained personal adviser. They may help you to benefit from a wide range of other services designed to help you move into suitable work.

### Can I get National Insurance credits while I am sick?

For each full week (Sunday to Saturday) of your Employment and Support Allowance, you may be able to get National Insurance credits. These credits can help you get other money in the future, such as State Pension.



Go to  
[www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators](http://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators)



Phone: **0800 055 6688 (0800 012 1888)**  
if you speak Welsh and live in Wales)



Textphone: **0800 023 4888**

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

### Who can get Employment and Support Allowance?

You may get Employment and Support Allowance if you have an illness or disability that affects your ability to work, and:

- you're off work or out of work
- you're self-employed
- you're aged 16 or over, but under pension age
- you're not entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance
- you work for an employer but can't get Statutory Sick Pay, or
- you've been getting Statutory Sick Pay but it has now stopped.

For the first 7 days of your illness, you may only have to tell us why you are sick. After that, you will have to get a medical statement from your doctor. You must then send it to us.

Medical statements are also known as fit notes, sick notes or medical certificates.

#### If you get a pension

Money from other pensions or health insurance schemes could affect the amount of Employment and Support Allowance you may get. This will depend on how much money your pension or scheme gives you.

You can't get Employment and Support Allowance if you've reached State Pension age. For information about changes to State Pension age, see page 15.

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## If you have a partner or children

If you are claiming income-related Employment and Support Allowance, you may get more money so that you can still support the people who depend on you.

If you have a husband, wife or civil partner, we may pay your benefit at the 'couples rate'. We may ask you to show us certificates of birth, marriage or civil partnership.

But if your partner is living with you and working, how much they earn could affect your income-related Employment and Support Allowance.

We use 'partner' to mean:

- a person you live with who is your husband, wife or civil partner, or
- a person you live with as if you are a married couple.

You can't claim extra Employment and Support Allowance for children, but you may get Child Tax Credit.



For more information go to:

[www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/tax-credits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/tax-credits)

### What happens when I claim?

You won't get any money for the first seven days of your claim. These are called 'waiting days'. In some cases, waiting days may not apply, for example if you've already had waiting days as part of an earlier benefit claim within the last 12 weeks or a period of Statutory Sick Pay. Waiting days do not apply if you are terminally ill.

After this, most people get a basic rate of Employment and Support Allowance during the assessment phase. The assessment phase usually takes 13 weeks. A different rate may apply if you have a partner - we call this the 'couple's rate'.

We use 'partner' to mean:

- a person you live with who is your husband, wife or civil partner, or
- a person you live with as if you are a married couple.

During the assessment phase, we decide whether you qualify to keep getting the allowance. We may be able to decide this based on your illness or disability, or we may need you to fill in a questionnaire or go to a 'work capability assessment'.

We also assess if you can take steps to find work, or if your illness or disability so severely affects your ability to work that taking these steps would not be reasonable.

If you refuse to have the assessment, or if you don't take part fully, it may affect your entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance.

After the assessment phase, if you still qualify for Employment and Support Allowance, you will move to the 'main phase' and get a higher amount.

The amounts change in April each year. To find out more, go to: [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits) or contact Jobcentre Plus for this year's rates.

## Helping you back into work

Research shows that people are better off in work. Work has many advantages – it is better for you financially, and for your health and well-being, your self-esteem and the future prospects of you and your family. For instance, people who are long-term unemployed or who have never worked are up to 3 times more likely to have poor health than people in work.

To get Employment and Support Allowance, we assess your illness or disability and how this affects the work you may be able to do.

### How do you assess what work I can do?

For the first 13 weeks, you'll get a basic rate of benefit and you'll need to send us medical statements. During this time, we may send you a questionnaire to complete in order to work out your ability in a number of specific areas and ask you to take part in a work capability assessment.

At the assessment, a healthcare professional – such as a doctor or registered nurse – will assess how well you can do things like walk, sit, stand up, use your hands, and see and hear. If you have a mental-health condition, they will assess how it affects things like your mood, the way you behave, the way you relate to the world around you, and how you cope with things from day to day.

They will write an assessment and send it to the office dealing with your claim. It will help us decide how your illness or disability limits the amount and type of work you can do, and whether you qualify for Employment and Support Allowance.

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We'll pay your bus fare, train fare or petrol costs for going to the assessment centre and back home. You must go to the assessment and take part fully, or your benefit may be affected.

If you can't go to the appointment given in the letter we send you, contact the assessment centre straight away.

### **Does everyone have to attend an assessment centre?**

Some illnesses and disabilities are so severe that we can decide whether you can get Employment and Support Allowance without you having to attend an assessment centre. If this applies to you, we'll tell you.

### **What if I am terminally ill?**

There are special rules for people who have a terminal illness and are not expected to live for more than 6 months. These rules mean that your claim will be dealt with more quickly, you will not need to go for an assessment and you will get the Support Group rate of Employment and Support Allowance straight away. If this applies to you, please speak to an adviser.

### **What if I have a mental-health condition?**

If you have a mental-health condition, we may ask you to fill in a questionnaire about how this affects you. We'll want to know if you have other health problems as well. We may talk to your doctor, and you may have to see one of our healthcare professionals.

A mental-health condition could affect your mood, the way you behave, the way you relate to the world around you, or how you cope with things from day to day.

These are the things we'll look at when we decide if you can get Employment and Support Allowance.

We will write to you before you are asked to take part in an assessment and explain how to get advice and support if you need it.



## What happens after my assessment?

If we find that your illness or disability limits your ability to work beyond a certain level, you will move into the 'main phase' of Employment and Support Allowance from week 14 of your claim. If the assessment phase is longer than 13 weeks, we will backdate your payment from the 14th week.

You'll get a higher amount of benefit, and you'll be put in 1 of 2 groups:

### Work-Related Activity Group

- If we think you could go back to work in the future, you'll get support to help you prepare for suitable work. You must take part fully in any work-focused interviews we invite you to and you may also need to take part in work-related activity or we may reduce your benefit.

If you are in this group and getting contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance, we can pay this for up to 365 days, from the date of your claim.

### Support Group

- If you have a condition that severely limits what you can do, you'll be in the Support Group. You'll not be expected to look for work and we won't expect you to take part in any work-focused interviews. But you can choose to take part in them if you want. If you get contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance we will continue to pay benefit as long as you are in the Support Group.

The assessment may find that you are able to work. If so, we won't pay you Employment and Support Allowance or give you National Insurance credits. If this happens, you may need to claim Jobseeker's Allowance.

You can find out more by going to: [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits) or contacting Jobcentre Plus. Our details are in the phone book.

### **What if I don't agree with the decision?**

If you think our decision is wrong you can appeal but only after you have requested a reconsideration of the decision. This is called a Mandatory Reconsideration. You must do this within one month of the date of the decision.

You can first ask for a written statement of reasons for the decision if you are unclear as to why the decision was made. Again you must ask for this within one month.

If you ask for a Mandatory Reconsideration we will ask you if you have additional relevant evidence that should be considered. You will be sent a Mandatory Reconsideration Notice which will explain our decision. If you do not agree with this, you will then be able to appeal against the decision.

The appeal is to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. The appeal will be heard by an independent tribunal.

The benefit decision notification will tell you how to apply for a Mandatory Reconsideration. The Mandatory Reconsideration Notice will tell you how to appeal.

### **Must I have an interview about work?**

If you are in the Work-Related Activity Group, you may have a work-focused interview with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. This will help you get ready for going back to work while you are claiming Employment and Support Allowance. If you don't take part, we may reduce your benefit.

### **Making work pay**

One of the aims of Employment and Support Allowance is to help you be better off in work than on benefit. Your personal adviser will help you work out how much you need to earn from a job so that you don't lose out.

There are schemes to help you get back to work and be better off than on benefit. Ask an adviser to tell you about:

- Housing Benefit extended payments
- training, and
- Working Tax Credit.

You may also be able to apply for a reduction in your Council Tax. To find out more, contact your local council.



To find a job go to:  
[www.gov.uk/jobsearch](http://www.gov.uk/jobsearch)



Phone: **0345 606 0234** (**0345 606 7890**  
if you speak Welsh and live in Wales)



Textphone: **0345 606 5255**

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

## How is my benefit paid?

We pay benefit straight into your account. This is the best way to get it because you can choose how and when to take your money out of your account. Your account can be with a bank, building society or the Post Office.

## What if I want someone to collect my benefit for me?

You may need someone to collect your benefit for you. For help with this, talk to the bank or building society where you have your account. If you need to name someone to deal with Jobcentre Plus for you, talk to a Jobcentre Plus adviser.

## Can I work if I get Employment and Support Allowance?

There are some kinds of work you may be able to do while you are getting Employment and Support Allowance. These are:

- unpaid work, such as for a charity (voluntary work), or
- ‘permitted work’ – work you are allowed to do while you are on the allowance that could help you get a job in the future.

### Volunteering

We know that volunteering can give you a better chance of finding paid work. So you can volunteer as many hours as you like while getting benefit, as long as you keep to the main benefit rules. You cannot do voluntary work for a relative. You must tell us before you start volunteering.

You must not be paid money or anything else for volunteering. It's okay to be paid your expenses, but you must tell us what you get and hold on to any receipts. Any money you get on top of expenses may be counted as earnings, and affect your benefit.

Choosing not to be paid is not the same as volunteering. If you're doing what someone else would normally be paid for, we class this as unpaid work, not volunteering. We may decide that what you would have been paid is ‘notional earnings’, and this may affect your benefit. We decide this by looking at whether:

- someone would normally be paid to do the same kind of work
- your work helps society or your community in some way, and
- you work for a charity or similar group.

## Permitted work

Permitted work is work you may do if you get Employment and Support Allowance. There are 3 types of permitted work:

- 1 You can earn up to £20 a week without affecting your benefit.
- 2 You can work under 16 hours a week and earn up to £101.00 a week for up to 52 weeks. After doing permitted work for 52 weeks, you must wait another 52 weeks before you can do this type of permitted work again.
- 3 If your work is supervised by someone from a local authority or voluntary group because it's their job to help ill or disabled people do work, you can work as many hours as you like as long as you don't earn more than £101.00 a week. For example, this applies if you're working in the community, a sheltered workshop or as part of a hospital treatment programme. You must be paid at least the National Minimum Wage.

You must talk to us before starting any permitted work.

If you get Housing Benefit or a reduction in your Council Tax, you must also tell your local council before you start permitted work, as it could affect your benefit or Council Tax.

## Changes in your life

### Telling us about any changes

You must tell us straight away if something changes that may affect your benefit. For example, tell us if you or your partner:

- move home (or other people move into or leave your home)
- change the account we pay benefits into
- change your income – including child maintenance and part-time earnings
- work more or fewer hours
- start getting, or stop getting, another benefit, or
- get other benefits and the amount goes up or down.

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If you get Employment and Support Allowance, you must tell us as soon as you start to get better and you:

- are able to do more, or
- start to feel a little better over a longer period of time.

You may start to feel better because you:

- have an operation
- use something to help you with your illness, or
- start taking new medicine.

You must also tell us as soon as your disability or illness changes or if it gets worse.

### **Important**

If you're not sure whether to tell us about a change, do it anyway. If you don't report a change when you should, you could risk action being taken against you, and your benefit reduced or stopped in the future. You will then have to pay back any overpaid money.

### **What if I am pregnant?**

If you're pregnant, you may get Statutory Maternity Pay from your employer. You can keep getting Employment and Support Allowance if you get it before your Statutory Maternity Pay – as long as you can prove that you're still too ill or disabled to work. When you get Statutory Maternity Pay, you will get less Employment and Support Allowance each week. But when you stop getting Statutory Maternity Pay, you will get the allowance again in full as long as you're still too ill or disabled to work.

If you're pregnant and can't get Statutory Maternity Pay, you may get Maternity Allowance. This will affect your Employment and Support Allowance. You can't get both in full at the same time, so you will get the mix of benefit that pays you the most. You must send us your medical statements or MATB1 form to make sure this happens.

If you still can't work because of an illness or disability when your Maternity Allowance ends, you can get Employment and Support Allowance. To make sure this happens, you must send us your medical statements.

### What if I go abroad?

In some circumstances, you may keep getting Employment and Support Allowance for up to 4 weeks during temporary trips abroad. This may apply:

- for some short trips
- if you have to go abroad to get medical treatment, or
- if you live with a member of the armed forces and go overseas with them.

If you get Employment and Support Allowance and you plan to go abroad, you must tell Jobcentre Plus straight away to check if your benefit will be affected. Special rules may also apply in some situations.



Go to: [www.gov.uk/benefits-if-you-are-abroad](http://www.gov.uk/benefits-if-you-are-abroad) for more information.

If you are able to get Employment and Support Allowance while you are abroad, you can arrange for someone else to get your payment for you while you are away. Or you can be paid when you get back, or in some circumstances, have it paid to you abroad.

### What happens when I reach State Pension age?

You can't get Employment and Support Allowance after you reach State Pension age.

State Pension age is the earliest age at which you can claim your State Pension. At the moment, the age at which men and women can claim their State Pension is different.

State Pension age is currently 65 for men. Women's State Pension age is rising in stages from 60 to 65 by November 2018.



To find more information about State Pension age go to: [www.gov.uk/calculate-state-pension](http://www.gov.uk/calculate-state-pension)

From December 2018, the State Pension age for both men and women will start to increase to reach 66 in October 2020. Under the changes in the Pensions Act 2014, men's and women's State Pension age will increase to 67 between 2026 and 2028.



Go to:  
[www.gov.uk/changes-state-pension](http://www.gov.uk/changes-state-pension)

### What if my husband, wife or civil partner dies?

You may still get Employment and Support Allowance, but any bereavement benefits you get may affect the amount of your Employment and Support Allowance.

If you don't have enough National Insurance contributions to get Employment and Support Allowance and your husband, wife or civil partner dies, you could get special credits that will let you get Employment and Support Allowance.

To get special credits, you must have an illness or disability and you must have stopped getting certain benefits for your husband, wife or civil partner on their death. You can't get special credits if your bereavement benefit stops because you:

- get married again
- form a new civil partnership, or
- start living with a new partner.

### What if I get other benefits?

If you get Employment and Support Allowance, depending on whether this is contribution-based or income-related, you may still be able to get some benefits, for example:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment



- Carer's Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Basic War Pension
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit or gratuity, or
- payments from your employer (this could include wages, company sick pay or a benefit from your union).

You may also be able to apply for a reduction in your Council Tax. To find out more, contact your local council.

You can't usually get Employment and Support Allowance if you get 1 or more of the following:

- Jobseeker's Allowance - you may be able to get contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance if you are jointly claiming income-based Jobseeker's Allowance with your partner
- State Pension
- money for training
- Statutory Sick Pay
- Income Support, or
- Incapacity Benefit.

### What if I have claimed compensation?

If you win compensation for your disability and also get Employment and Support Allowance, the allowance may be taken off your compensation.

To find out more about how claiming compensation can affect your benefits, contact the Compensation Recovery Unit.



Go to:

[www.gov.uk/government/collections/cru](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/cru)



Phone: **0191 225 2383**

Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm

## Help with health costs

You may get help with some health costs - including NHS prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and some travel costs - if you're on a low income or get:

- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support, or
- Pension Credit.

You may get help with health costs if you get Universal Credit. The rules are likely to change in 2014, so please check the NHS website for up-to-date information



To find out more about help with health costs, go to:  
[www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits)

If the NHS finds that you have wrongly claimed that you meet the requirements for the NHS to cover the cost of your treatment, you may be guilty of an offence and you may have to pay a penalty charge.

This leaflet is no longer current.  
You can find up to date information on GOV.UK

## Call charges

You can use the **0845** code to call any of our **0345** numbers. Check with your phone company which code is cheaper for you.

Calls to **0800** numbers are free from BT landlines but you may have to pay if you use another phone company, a mobile phone, or if you're calling from abroad.

You can ask us to call you back if you're concerned about the cost of the call.

## Textphones

Our textphone numbers are for people who cannot speak or hear clearly. If you don't have a textphone, you could check if your local library or citizens' advice bureau has one. Our textphones don't receive text messages from mobile phones.

This leaflet is no longer current.  
You can find up to date information on GOV.UK

## Important information about this leaflet

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct as of October 2014. It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law.

You can find more information about benefits and pensions online.



For benefits information go to:  
[www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits)



For pensions information go to:  
[www.gov.uk/browse/working/state-pension](http://www.gov.uk/browse/working/state-pension)