

## Being assessed for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

*This factsheet looks at how your capability for work is assessed for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and gives tips on completing the ESA50 Form Employment and Support Allowance.*

**At some point in the first 13 weeks of your ESA claim you will have your capability for work assessed.**

The test used to assess this is called the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The WCA is used to assess the way your condition affects your ability to perform a range of activities. The test is applied by looking at what you write on form ESA50 and what happens at the medical examination that you will usually have to attend after completing the form.

Unless you are terminally ill and therefore exempt from the WCA you will be sent form ESA50. This form must be completed. If you do not complete this form the DWP will automatically stop your ESA unless you show 'good cause' for failing to return the completed form.

The ESA50 asks about the effects that any physical disabilities or health problems have on common activities, and also about the effects of any mental health problems and intellectual difficulties on those activities.

Under each of these activities is a list of problems of varying degrees of severity. These are called 'descriptors'. The questionnaire asks you to select the descriptor in each activity that most closely matches how difficult you find it to perform the activity in question.

A points system is used by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to determine whether you pass the test. Each descriptor is given a fixed number of points, ranging from 0 to 15 (the number of points allocated is not shown on the form). To pass the test you need to score 15 points in total. The points can come from any combination of activities.

Exact details of all the activities, descriptors and points used in the test are given in this factsheet from **page 3** onwards.

## **Treated as having Limited Capability for Work**

You can be 'treated as having limited capability for work' and pass the test without having to score the 15 points if:

- you are terminally ill.
- you receive any form of chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer, or you are likely to receive such treatment within 6 months, or you are recovering from such treatment.
- you receive any of the following forms of medical treatment:
  - (i) plasmapheresis, or
  - (ii) weekly haemodialysis for chronic renal failure, or
  - (iii) weekly treatment by way of total parenteral nutrition for gross impairment of enteric function.
- you suffer from a specific disease or bodily or mental disablement and there would be a substantial risk to yours or someone's mental or physical health if you were found to have limited capability for work.
- you have been requested or given notice, under specific legislation, to refrain from work because you are a carrier of, or have been in contact with, an infectious disease.
- you are pregnant and there would be a serious risk to your health or your child's if you did not refrain from work.
- you are pregnant or have recently given birth but you are not entitled to maternity allowance or statutory maternity pay, from 6 weeks before the baby is due to 2 weeks after the birth.
- you are receiving treatment as in an-patient in hospital or similar institution or are recovering from such treatment.
- you are a qualifying student who receives any rate of Disability Living Allowance.

## **Advice on completing the form**

Take into account the following when completing the form:

- Be honest about the extent of your disability/ill health. You should not exaggerate, but neither should you underestimate your problems.
- If your condition is variable this should be explained in your own words, with examples of how variations in your health affect your ability to perform the WCA's activities.
- The test takes into account your abilities when using any aid or appliance you would normally use, e.g. glasses, walking stick, unless the activity specifies otherwise.
- Answer questions in terms of your ability to do them in the course of a normal day. For example, if you can only bend down once and not repeatedly this does not mean you can do the activity (this will not apply where the activity specifies the frequency of the activity in question).
- If performing an activity is of risk to your health, enough to put a reasonable person off doing it, it may be that you cannot reasonably be expected to perform that activity.
- If a doctor has told you to avoid certain activities, make this clear.
- If a particular task gives you pain or discomfort this should be recorded, in detail, on the ESA50.
- Give any extra relevant information in the additional space provided.

## **Returning the ESA50**

Return the ESA50 within **four weeks** of receiving it. If you don't return it within four weeks your ESA will be stopped unless you show good cause for not returning the form.

After you have returned the form you will usually be offered a medical with a health care professional who will give their opinion on how many points you should score. You must attend this medical unless you can show good cause for failing to do so.

## **Decision**

If, after the WCA is applied, you are found to not have limited capability for work, you will be refused ESA. If you disagree with this decision you should make an appeal as soon as possible using form GL24. Form GL24 is available from your local DWP office. You only have one month from the date on the decision letter in which to appeal. This deadline can only be extended in exceptional circumstances. On the next few pages you will find details of the descriptors and how many points can be scored on each.

## The limited capability for work assessment

Physical activity descriptors

Points

### 1. Mobilising unaided by another person with or without a walking stick, manual wheelchair or other aid if such aid is normally, or could reasonably be worn or used.

<b>(a)</b>	Cannot either: (i) mobilise more than 50 metres on level ground without stopping in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion; or (ii) repeatedly mobilise 50 metres within a reasonable timescale because of significant discomfort or exhaustion.	<b>15pts</b>
<b>(b)</b>	Cannot mount or descend two steps unaided by another person even with the support of a handrail.	<b>9pts</b>
<b>(c)</b>	Cannot either: (i) mobilise more than 100 metres on level ground without stopping in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion; or (ii) repeatedly mobilise 100 metres within a reasonable timescale because of significant discomfort or exhaustion.	<b>9pts</b>
<b>(d)</b>	Cannot either: (i) mobilise more than 200 metres on level ground without stopping in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion; or (ii) repeatedly mobilise 200 metres within a reasonable timescale because of significant discomfort or exhaustion.	<b>6pts</b>
<b>(e)</b>	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

### 2. Standing and sitting.

<b>(a)</b>	Cannot move between one seated position and another seated position located next to one another without receiving physical assistance from another person.	<b>15pts</b>
<b>(b)</b>	Cannot, for the majority of the time, remain at a work station, either: (i) standing unassisted by another person (even if free to move around); or (ii) sitting (even in an adjustable chair) for more than 30 minutes, before needing to move away in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion; or (iii) a combination of (i) and (ii); for more than an hour, before needing to move away in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion.	<b>9pts</b>

(c)	Cannot, for the majority of the time, remain at a work station, either: (i) standing unassisted by another person (even if free to move around); or (ii) sitting (even in an adjustable chair) for more than an hour before needing to move away in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion; or (iii) a combination of (i) and (ii); for more than an hour, before needing to move away in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

### 3. Reaching.

(a)	Cannot raise either arm as if to put something in the top pocket of a coat or jacket.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Cannot raise either arm to top of head as if to put on a hat.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Cannot raise either arm above head height as if to reach for something.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

### 4. Picking up and moving or transferring by the use of the upper body and arms.

(a)	Cannot pick up and move a 0.5 litre carton full of liquid.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Cannot pick up and move a one litre carton full of liquid.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Cannot transfer a light but bulky object such as an empty cardboard box.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

### 5. Manual dexterity.

(a)	Cannot either: (i) press a button, such as a telephone keypad; or (ii) turn the pages of a book with either hand.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Cannot pick up a £1 coin or equivalent with either hand.	<b>15pts</b>
(c)	Cannot use a pen or pencil to make a meaningful mark.	<b>9pts</b>
(d)	Cannot single-handedly use a suitable keyboard or mouse.	<b>9pts</b>
(e)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

### 6. Making self understood through speaking, writing, typing, or other means which are normally or could reasonably be, used, unaided by another person.

(a)	Cannot convey a simple message, such as the presence of a hazard.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Has significant difficulty conveying a simple message to strangers.	<b>15pts</b>
(c)	Has some difficulty conveying a simple message to strangers.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>7. Understanding communication by:</b>		
	(i) verbal means (such as hearing or lip reading) alone,	
	(ii) nonverbal means (such as reading 16 point print or Braille) alone, or	
	(iii) a combination of (i) and (ii), using any aid that is normally, or could reasonably be used, unaided by another person.	
(a)	Cannot understand a simple message due to sensory impairment, such as the location of a fire escape.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Has significant difficulty understanding a simple message from a stranger due to sensory impairment.	<b>15pts</b>
(c)	Has some difficulty understanding a simple message from a stranger due to sensory impairment.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>8. Navigation and maintaining safety, using a guide dog or other aid if either or both are normally, or could reasonably be used.</b>		
(a)	Unable to navigate around familiar surroundings, without being accompanied by another person, due to sensory impairment.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Cannot safely complete a potentially hazardous task such as crossing the road, without being accompanied by another person, due to sensory impairment.	<b>15pts</b>
(c)	Unable to navigate around unfamiliar surroundings, without being accompanied by another person, due to sensory impairment.	<b>9pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>9. Absence or loss of control whilst conscious leading to extensive evacuation of the bowel and/or bladder, other than enuresis (bed-wetting) despite the wearing or use of any aids or adaptations which are normally or could reasonably be worn or used.</b>		
(a)	At least once a month experiences: (i) loss of control leading to extensive evacuation of the bowel and/or voiding of the bladder; or (ii) substantial leakage of the contents of a collecting device sufficient to require cleaning and a change in clothing.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	The majority of the time is at risk of loss of control leading to extensive evacuation of the bowel and/or voiding of the bladder, sufficient to require cleaning and a change in clothing, if not able to reach a toilet quickly.	<b>6pts</b>
(c)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>10. Consciousness during waking moments.</b>		
(a)	At least once a week, has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness resulting in significantly disrupted awareness or concentration.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	At least once a month, has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness resulting in significantly disrupted	<b>6pts</b>

	awareness or concentration.	
(c)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

Mental, cognitive and intellectual activity descriptors

Points

<b>11. Learning tasks.</b>		
(a)	Cannot learn how to complete a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Cannot learn anything beyond a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Cannot learn anything beyond a moderately complex task, such as the steps involved in operating a washing machine to clean clothes.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>12. Awareness of 15 everyday hazards (such as boiling water or sharp objects).</b>		
(a)	Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions such that they require supervision for the majority of the time to maintain safety.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions such that they frequently require supervision to maintain safety.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Reduced awareness of everyday hazards leads to a significant risk of: (i) injury to self or others; or (ii) damage to property or possessions such that they occasionally require supervision to maintain safety.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>13. Initiating and completing personal action (which means planning, organisation, problem solving, prioritising or switching tasks).</b>		
(a)	Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least two sequential personal actions.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least two personal actions for the majority of the time.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Frequently cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least two personal actions.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

<b>14. Coping with change.</b>		
(a)	Cannot cope with any change to the extent that day to day life cannot be managed.	<b>15pts</b>

(b)	Cannot cope with minor planned change (such as a pre-arranged change to the routine time scheduled for a lunch break), to the extent that overall day to day life is made significantly more difficult.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Cannot cope with minor unplanned change (such as the timing of an appointment on the day it is due to occur), to the extent that overall, day to day life is made significantly more difficult.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

#### **15. Getting about.**

(a)	Cannot get to any place outside the claimant's home with which the claimant is familiar.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is familiar, without being accompanied by another person.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is unfamiliar without being accompanied by another person.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

#### **16. Coping with social engagement due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder.**

(a)	Engagement in social contact is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual.	<b>9pts</b>
(c)	Engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is not possible for the majority of the time due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual.	<b>6pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

#### **17. Appropriateness of behaviour with other people, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder.**

(a)	Has, on a daily basis, uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.	<b>15pts</b>
(b)	Frequently has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.	<b>15pts</b>
(c)	Occasionally has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.	<b>9pts</b>
(d)	None of the above apply.	<b>0pts</b>

## **The Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity test**

This test is important because it decides which of two groups of ESA claimants you will be placed in: the Work-Related Activity Group or the Support Group. The two groups receive different amounts of benefit and have different responsibilities when it comes to performing work-related activity.

### **Work-Related Activity Group**

In the Work-Related Activity Group you experience two main differences from someone in the Support Group:

- You receive an extra £28.15 a week on top of the basic (assessment group) rate of ESA: this is called the work-related activity component.
- If you are placed in the Work-Related Activity Group, you will be expected to take part in work related activity with your personal adviser. You will get support to help you prepare for suitable work. Failure to attend or take in this work related activity without good cause – for example, being ill or having a hospital appointment that it would be unreasonable to rearrange - will result in your ESA being reduced.

The vast majority of claimants will be placed into the Work Related Activity Group.

### **Support Group**

In the Support Group you experience two main differences from someone in the Work-Related Activity Group:

- You receive an extra £34.05 a week on top of the basic (assessment group) rate of ESA: this is called the 'support component'.
- Your illness or disability has a severe effect on your ability to work therefore you won't be expected to work and you won't be expected to take part in work related activity. But, you can work on a voluntary basis if you want to.

Only a small percentage of claimants will be placed in the Support Group.

## **How is it decided which group you are placed in?**

As well as assessing if you have limited capability for work, the WCA also contains the limited capability for work-related activity test. This simply means if one of the descriptors on the following pages applies to you, you will be placed in the Support Group. If none of the descriptors applies to you, you will be placed in the Work-Related Activity Group.

You have a right of appeal against the decision to place you into the Work-Related Activity Group. You must appeal within one month of the decision being made.

## The Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity assessment

**NB** If any of the following applies to you, you will be placed in the Support Group. If none applies, you will be placed in the Work-Related Activity Group.

Activity and descriptors

### 1. Mobilising unaided by another person with or without a walking stick, manual wheelchair or other aid if such aid is normally, or could reasonably be worn or used.

Cannot either:

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| (a) | mobilise more than 50 metres on level ground without stopping in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion; or |
| (b) | repeatedly mobilise 50 metres within a reasonable timescale because of significant discomfort or exhaustion.             |

### 2. Transferring from one seated position to another.

Cannot move between one seated position and another seated position located next to one another without receiving physical assistance from another person.

### 3. Reaching.

Cannot raise either arm as if to put something in the top pocket of a coat or jacket.

### 4. Picking up and moving or transferring by the use of the upper body and arms (excluding standing, sitting, bending or kneeling and all other activities specified in this Schedule).

Cannot pick up and move a 0.5 litre carton full of liquid.

### 5. Manual dexterity.

Cannot either:

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| (a) | press a button, such as a telephone keypad; or |
| (b) | turn the pages of a book with either hand.     |

### 6. Making self understood through speaking, writing, typing, or other means which are normally, or could reasonably be, used, unaided by another person.

Cannot convey a simple message, such as the presence of a hazard.

**7. Understanding communication**

- (i) verbal means (such as hearing or lip reading) alone,
- (ii) non-verbal means (such as reading 16 point print or Braille) alone, or
- (iii) any combination of (i) and (ii), using any aid that is normally, or could reasonably be, used, unaided by another person.

Cannot understand a simple message due to sensory impairment, such as the location of a fire escape.

**8. Absence or loss of control whilst conscious leading to extensive evacuation of the bowel and/or voiding of the bladder, other than enuresis (bed-wetting), despite the wearing or use of any aids or adaptations which are normally, or could reasonably be, worn or used.**

At least once a week experiences:

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| (a) | loss of control leading to extensive evacuation of the bowel and/or voiding of the bladder; or   |
| (b) | substantial leakage of the contents of a collecting device sufficient to require the individual to clean themselves and change clothing. |

**9. Learning tasks.**

Cannot learn how to complete a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder.

**10. Awareness of hazard.**

Reduced awareness of everyday hazards, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder, leads to a significant risk of:

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| (a) | injury to self or others; or  |
| (b) | damage to property or possessions such that they require supervision for the majority of the time to maintain safety. |

**11. Initiating and completing personal action (which means planning, organisation, problem solving, prioritising or switching tasks).**

Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 sequential personal actions.

**12. Coping with change.**

Cannot cope with any change, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder, to the extent that day to day life cannot be managed.

**13. Coping with social engagement, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder.**

Engagement in social contact is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the individual.

**14. Appropriateness of behaviour with other people, due to cognitive impairment or mental disorder.**

Has, on a daily basis, uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace.

**15. Conveying food or drink to the mouth.**

(a)	Cannot convey food or drink to the claimant's own mouth without receiving physical assistance from someone else;
(b)	Cannot convey food or drink to the claimant's own mouth without repeatedly stopping, experiencing breathlessness or severe discomfort;
(c)	Cannot convey food or drink to the claimant's own mouth without receiving regular prompting given by someone else in the claimant's physical presence; or
(d)	Owing to a severe disorder of mood or behaviour, fails to convey food or drink to the claimant's own mouth without receiving: (i) physical assistance from someone else; or (ii) regular prompting given by someone else in the claimant's presence.

**16. Chewing or swallowing food or drink.**

(a)	Cannot chew or swallow food or drink;
(b)	Cannot chew or swallow food or drink without repeatedly stopping, experiencing breathlessness or severe discomfort;
(c)	Cannot chew or swallow food or drink without repeatedly receiving regular prompting given by someone else in the claimant's presence; or
(d)	Owing to a severe disorder of mood or behaviour, fails to: (i) chew or swallow food or drink; or (ii) chew or swallow food or drink without regular prompting given by someone else in the claimant's presence.

Even if you do not satisfy one of the descriptors, you can be treated as satisfying the test and automatically be placed in the Support Group if:

- you are terminally ill; or
- you are receiving any form of chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer, or you are likely to receive such treatment within 6 months, or you are recovering from such treatment; or
- you have a specific disease or bodily or mental disablement and there would be a substantial risk to the mental or physical health of any person if you were placed in the Work-Related Activity Group; or
- you are a pregnant woman, and there would be a substantial risk to your or your baby's health if you undertook work-related activity.

## What happens now?

After the WCA is completed, a decision maker will send you a written decision. This should tell you:

- whether you have a limited capability for work and are entitled to ESA or not, you have a right of appeal against this decision.
- if you are entitled to ESA, which group you will be placed

- in. You also have a right of appeal against this decision.
- if you are placed in the Support Group, you should receive ESA without any requirement to engage in work related activity. However, you can still do some work voluntarily, including paid work in certain circumstances, without this affecting your entitlement to ESA.

### Need more advice?

#### Jobcentre Plus

Phone 0845 6060 234

#### Newcastle Welfare Rights

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights)