

Completing welfare benefits application forms

- 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 forms is often the first stage of applying for many types of welfare benefits. The application form 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 completing benefits application forms can feel daunting, especially as they can often be lengthy and require a substantial amount of information to be provided.

This publication is written to offer guidance to brain injury survivors on completing benefits application forms.

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

Tips for completing forms

- **Make a note of any deadline dates** by which you must return the form. This should be included in the letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that accompanied your application form. It might help to set an alarm a few days ahead of the date, or to write it down on a calendar. Contact the DWP if you feel you may need more time with completing the form.
- Consider asking **someone to help you** with completing the form. This should be someone who knows you well and understands the impact of your brain injury. This can be especially helpful and important if you have

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problems with your memory or insight, as these issues may cause you to forget to include important details relevant to your application.

- Ask healthcare professionals for any medical evidence (such as letters and reports) to be written in a way that **specifically address the difficulties you describe** in your application form. For instance, you could ask your GP to write a letter about how your brain injury has affected the type of thinking skills that you would rely on for work, or your physiotherapist could write about how you have one sided weakness that makes it difficult for you to get washed/dressed by yourself. Ask for details of any recommended aids or appliances to be included in the letter as well.
- If you are submitting medical evidence from several years ago, consider that **evidence older than 2 years might be dismissed**, so ask your GP/consultant to confirm that the evidence is still relevant and applicable.
- Many people feel that the application forms are quite lengthy. Take breaks if you need to and **tackle one section at a time** rather than trying to complete the whole form in one go.
- If you are worried about writing the wrong thing down on your form, **draft your answers** on a separate piece of paper first.
- Avoid simply stating 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?

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- Include details of **the effects of any medication you are on, or any rehabilitation** you are currently undergoing.
- **Keep a diary** for a few days before completing your form, with details of how your brain injury affects you. You can then refer to this information while completing the forms as a general guide to some of the issues you face on a regular basis.
- Once you have completed the form, **keep a dated copy for yourself**. This will be useful for you to refer to during the assessment that follows, for any future appeals you may need to undertake or generally for your own records.
- Issues like fatigue or memory problems may have an impact on several different aspects of your life, so **may need to be repeated** in different sections of your application form.

The most important thing to remember while completing your application form is to **be honest about the impact of your brain injury**. Offer as much detail as you can, including any effects that fluctuate. You will probably have a chance to explain things in more detail during an assessment that follows, but claims can sometimes be processed based on the information in an application form alone, so it is good to add as much detail as you possibly can at this stage.

If you need further assistance with completing your form, consider contacting 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.

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