# Attendance Allowance: how to make an effective claim

## Introduction

If you have sight loss, or provide care for someone who does, there are a number of welfare benefits you may be entitled to. Some of these benefits can help provide you with an income if you are not able to work, while others can help towards the extra costs that often make life more expensive if you have a disability.

We have produced various factsheets to help you learn more about the benefits that you are most likely to be entitled to if your life is affected by sight loss.

This factsheet is about Attendance Allowance (AA), a benefit paid by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to people who have reached State Pension age who need help with personal care because of a disability or a health problem, such as sight loss.

Please note that if you have already claimed and are receiving Personal Independence Allowance (PIP) you will continue to receive this benefit beyond reaching your State Pension age. You also can’t claim AA if you have an ongoing claim for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP)/Adult Disability Payment (Scotland only) (ADP).

Many thousands of people with significant sight loss receive AA. You don’t have to be registered as blind (severely sight impaired) or partially sighted (sight impaired) to make a claim, and it does not matter how much income you receive or savings you have. You also don’t need to have anyone caring for you to receive AA.

To get AA you must show that you **need** help because of your disability; it does not matter whether any help is being **provided at present**. AA is tax free and can be paid on top of any other pensions, benefits or other income. You will only qualify for AA if you have needed help for at **least six months**.

There are two levels of AA. If you need help during the day or during the night you may qualify for the **lower** rate. If you need help during **both** theday and night you may qualify for the **higher** rate.

This factsheet focuses on how you can make the most effective claim for AA by:

1. giving you a **checklist** for what sorts of things to include on your form
2. showing you how keeping a **care diary** can provide a compelling picture of your needs and support your claim
3. letting you know what to do if you are not happy with the outcome of your claim.

If your claim for AA is successful, you will receive one of two weekly rates, depending on how much care you need:

* a low rate: £72.65
* a high rate: £108.55.

### Living in special accommodation

If you go to live in special accommodation such as a care home or hospital, your AA usually stops after four weeks. However, if you pay the care home fees in full yourself, even if you previously received local authority funding, you may be able to still receive AA. This is a complex area so please call our Helpline for further advice.

## How to claim Attendance Allowance

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales:

Call the DWP Attendance Allowance Helpline on **0800 731 0122** (or textphone **0800 731 0317**)to get your claim form. You can also download a claim form from **gov.uk/attendance-allowance/how-to-claim**, once you have completed the form, post it to your relevant DWP AA unit.

If you live in Northern Ireland:

Call the Disability and Carers Service on **0800 587 0912** (or textphone **0800 012 1574**) to get your claim form. You can also download an application form from **nidirect.gov.uk**.

It is usually beneficial to call and request a claim form, even if you then download a version. This is because, making the call fixes your date of claim, as long as you complete the form within the required time period.

Please note – changes are planned for Scotland regarding Attendance Allowance in the coming years. AA will be replaced in Scotland by a benefit called “pension age disability payment”. The qualifying rules for this are likely to be very similar to those for the current AA. We will update this factsheet as and when more information becomes available.

Before requesting an application form, remember that to make a claim for AA you must:

* Be habitually resident in the UK – this is decided by looking at various factors including reasons for coming to the UK, the length of your stay, future intentions, and previous links with the country.
* Satisfy the past presence test – you will have had to be present in the UK for 104 out of the previous 156 weeks (two out of the last three years). You do not have to satisfy the past presence test if you have a terminal illness.

These rules are complicated and there are some exceptions, for instance if you are living in a European Economic Area (EEA) country, so contact our Helpline if you think you may have difficulty passing these tests.

### The Attendance Allowance claim form

The DWP decides most claims solely on the information you put in your claim form, so it is important to clearly explain the problems you have because of your sight loss and any other health problems. Take time to think carefully about your answers. You may want to complete the application form in more than one sitting; the online version of the form allows you to save your progress and come back to it later.

The first few pages of the form ask for your personal details and are quite straightforward to fill in.

The form then asks about your disabilities or health conditions and if you see any doctors or specialists. This part of the form is laid out like a table where you list; your disabilities, how long you have had them, which part of your body is affected (for example if it is a condition like arthritis or rheumatism) and asks you to list any medication you take. If you are registered as blind or partially sighted, you should say so here and what date you were registered. If you have a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI), send a copy with the form. If you were registered some time ago and your sight has deteriorated since, you should also mention this.

The DWP may want to write to your GP or hospital doctor to get more information about your condition.

If this still does not provide enough detailed information about your disability or health conditions, then the decision maker can arrange for a DWP approved healthcare professional to assess you and prepare a medical report. This assessment can sometimes be held in your home or at a centre which should be within a reasonable distance from your home. This assessment will go through your application to get further information about your claim.

The most important parts of the form are the sections where you explain **how** your sight loss, other disabilities or health problems affect you. The form asks about:

* the help you need during the day
* the help you need during the night
* when your difficulties began
* anything else you wish to tell the DWP.

If you run out of space on the form, you can write on another sheet of paper and attach it. Remember to write your name and national insurance number clearly on any additional paperwork you send with your claim form.

#### How to explain the help you need

It is important that you fill out these parts of the form fully. Do not underestimate your needs. Most people find that a positive attitude makes it easier to live with sight loss. However, just on this occasion, think of all the things that you cannot do or have trouble with because of your disability.

Think about a typical day or week in your life and consider all the times when you may have difficulty or need extra help. It can be very helpful for you, or someone close to you, to make a list of all the things that you need help with over a few days. Even if you only need assistance for a few moments each time, the different types of help do add up.

For example, when you are getting dressed, you might need someone to check your clothes are clean or help with fastenings such as zips or shoelaces. You may avoid wearing certain clothing that you find difficult to manage. These might seem like small things, and you might have got used to not being able to do them independently, but you should still mention them on your claim form.

Maybe you have developed special ways of coping with certain activities. However, if an activity takes you much longer than it would take a sighted person, or if it is difficult for you to do it safely, ensure you mention this.

It is the amount of help that you reasonably **need** that matters, not the amount of help that you actually **get**.

If you are struggling to do things unaided because of difficulties or pain, explain this on the form. Be sure to mention if you lead a restricted lifestyle because you do not get all the help you need.

#### Focus on frequency

To qualify for AA, you must show that you need “frequent attention throughout the day.” For example, if you need help looking after your appearance, this could add up to six or seven times a day if you include help to check your clothes are clean after a meal, help to find a coat or matching shoes to go out, and so on.

The law says that the help you need can only count as “attention” if it is closely connected to your “bodily functions”. These are physical functions that include, for example, seeing, hearing, speaking and eating.

#### Supervision

Another way to get AA is to show that you need “continual supervision”. You meet the continual supervision criteria if you need someone to keep an eye on you to prevent the risk of causing substantial danger to yourself or others. You may satisfy the supervision condition if you:

* suffer from fits or seizures because of diabetes or epilepsy
* are at risk of accidents due to dementia, memory loss, confusion or dizzy spells
* are prone to falls indoors as well as outdoors
* have recently lost your sight and have not been able to adjust.

Please note however that most blind and partially sighted people with no additional disabilities are unlikely to qualify for the need for “continual supervision”.

#### Help during the night

If you need help with personal care or someone to watch over you during the night as well as during the day, you may be able to get the higher rate of AA. For example, you might need someone to help you get up and use the toilet or to take medication during the night. You will have to show that you need help with personal care at least **twice** during the night, or that you need help for one period of at least **20 minutes**.

Alternatively, if you don’t need assistance, but **do** need watching over (needing to have someone else be awake and listening or getting up and checking how you are) then this needs to be at least **three times** during the night or for one period of at least **20 minutes**.

Remember, it is your **need** for help at night that matters, and it doesn’t matter whether you actually **get** the assistance at the moment.

#### If you use special equipment, explain its limitations

Special equipment can be useful, but often it does not fully solve the problem – some help from another person is still needed.

For example, if you are partially sighted, you may be able to read using a magnifier, but still need help from another person to read long sections of text, small print, handwriting, or writing that you cannot get up close to.

If you use a computer or other equipment to help you communicate, you might need help with setting it up or using it. Explain if you have tried a particular piece of equipment but found it unhelpful.

#### Mention any special circumstances

Be sure to explain the effects of all health problems, and how they interact with each other. Has your sight or your health got worse recently? Say if your sight loss has been sudden or you have found it hard to adapt. Mention if you have had a bereavement or recently moved to a new home.

## Checklist of care needs

This checklist gives examples of the kinds of things to think about when explaining the help that you need with seeing. Use it as a guide but remember to give plenty of information in your own words about your personal circumstances.

### Washing, bathing and looking after your appearance

Do you need help:

* to adjust shower controls?
* to find and identify different bottles and items in the bathroom?
* to get into or out of your bath or shower?
* to check that your face and hands are clean?
* shaving or putting on make-up?
* washing, rinsing, drying or styling your hair?
* putting toothpaste on the brush or cleaning dentures?
* cutting your nails?

Do you need someone to act as a mirror several times a day to tell you whether your clothes are clean and tidy or if your hair and general appearance is presentable?

### Help with your toilet needs

Do you need:

* someone to guide you so you can get to the toilet safely, especially in unfamiliar places?
* help to adjust or check your clothing after using the toilet?
* help to find the toilet and the wash basin in unfamiliar places?
* help to use the toilet during the night?
* help to change clothes or bedding if you have a toilet accident?

### Getting dressed or undressed

Do you need:

* help to find and choose clean, colour coordinated clothes, that are appropriate for the weather?
* help with fastenings including shoelaces and buttons?
* someone to tell you if a piece of clothing is on inside out or you are wearing odd socks or shoes?

### Mealtimes

Do you need someone to:

* help you put the food on your plate and pour drinks for you?
* describe the food on your plate and tell you where each item is?
* cut up certain foods and to remove bones?
* tell you if there is any food left on your plate?
* help you to find other items on the table? For example, cutlery, condiments, your glass of water
* tell you if you have spilt food on the table or on your plate?
* help you to make hot drinks safely and carry them safely around your home. For example, carry your drink from your kitchen to another room?
* help you to read menus or select food in restaurants and move around safely in restaurants?

If you cook for yourself, you may need help to:

* read cooking instructions, recipes and use by dates
* check that vegetables are properly washed or that food is properly cooked
* use the cooker, microwave oven and any other kitchen equipment such as knives.

Your need for support with cooking will not be considered if someone cooks or prepares food for you. However, if your food is prepared or cooked by others, you should write down why you cannot cook for yourself and the kinds of problems you have or might have, if you did try to prepare and cook for yourself.

### Help with medical treatment

Do you need help to:

* identify and sort out your tablets?
* measure and pour liquid medicine?
* read instructions about taking medication?
* take eye drops?
* find dropped or spilt medication?
* manage diabetes? Including testing blood sugar or urine, monitoring and recording results or having insulin injections.
* change batteries in your hearing aid?

### Help getting around indoors

Do you need help to:

* move around in your own or other people’s homes, and other places such as public buildings or restaurants?
* get upstairs or downstairs safely?
* avoid bumping into furniture, doors, doorframes or other obstacles?
* deal with callers to the house, checking ID or signing receipts?
* cope with changes in the environment, such as moving from sunlight outdoors to a dimly lit room?

### Help getting around outdoors

Do you need help to:

* get to particular places in familiar or unfamiliar areas?
* check road signs or to read street names?
* avoid getting lost or getting into danger in unfamiliar areas?
* avoid obstacles such as lampposts, potholes or other pedestrians?
* cope with kerbs and steps?
* cross roads safely?

Do you need extra help at night, in poor or bright light?

### Public transport

Do you need help to:

* read bus numbers, timetables, identify train platforms or bus stops?
* get onto the bus or train and find an empty seat?
* get off the bus or train safely or at the right stop?
* find a taxi rank, get into the taxi or pay the driver?

### Shopping

Do you need help to:

* find the items you need and read labels?
* count your money and change?
* sign receipts or put in your PIN number when paying by card?

### Domestic duties

You may need a lot of help with domestic duties, such as cooking and shopping. If you do your own cooking or shopping and need a sighted person to lend a hand, this may help you to get AA. For example, you may need someone to guide you to and around the shops or you may need someone to read cooking instructions or read prices or sizes of items to you.

### Accidents, falls and stumbles

Describe any accidents or falls you have had. Try to remember where you fell, if having somebody with you could have prevented it and if you needed help afterwards, for example to apply first aid.

Mention if you stumble on obstacles and hazards indoors or outdoors, such as stairs, steps or uneven paving.

### Reading

Do you need help with:

* reading and replying to mail?
* signing letters or forms?
* reading things about the home such as labels on food and other items?
* reading instructions for household items or medication?
* reading newspapers and magazines?
* reading in connection with your studies or hobbies? For example, needing someone to read the TV listings to you.

### Other help

Do you need help with locating things you have dropped, or finding items around the home?

### Social or leisure activities

You can write about activities that you would like to do, even if you cannot do them because you do not get the help you need. For example:

* visiting friends and family
* going out because it makes you feel better – for exercise or for fresh air. If you would like to go out every day, say so
* gardening
* playing bingo or cards
* going to pubs, restaurants or theatres
* watching television and needing someone to describe or explain what is happening during a programme or film
* identifying CDs or DVDs
* sports, keep fit, swimming
* going to a place of worship and following the service
* voluntary or community work
* reading for leisure, crossword puzzles and so on.

Are there any hobbies you have had to give up because you can no longer do them independently?

Explain about the kinds of help that you need when doing these activities. This may include:

* coping with transport
* guidance when walking in unfamiliar places
* help to locate and use tools or items that you need to do a hobby
* help to read notices, instructions and other information
* help with handling money and buying tickets, drinks, or other items
* having your surroundings described to you and being told who else is there
* help to recognise friends or acquaintances, to recognise who is talking in a group.

### Other information

The claim pack also has a page for someone who knows you to say how your disability or illness affects you. This could be a relative or friend, or a professional such as your GP or social worker. You do not have to complete this page, but it may provide useful evidence for a DWP Decision Maker.

### Keeping a care diary to support your claim

Your claim for Attendance Allowance (AA) will be decided by a Decision Maker (DM) at the DWP. The DM considers all the evidence about your care needs and decides whether to award AA and at what level.

## What evidence do the DWP use to make a decision on my claim?

Your answers on the claim form are the most important source of evidence about your care needs. A DM might also contact your GP or hospital doctor for more information.

A care diary can provide very helpful additional evidence to support your claim. Remember that the rules for lower rate AA say that you must need “frequent attention in connection with your bodily functions throughout the day”. One of the best ways to show that you need help frequently is to keep a diary for a day or so. In your diary, make a note of all the times you need help or when you have difficulty doing a task because of your sight loss, other health conditions or disabilities. You could record your diary on audio format if that is easier than making written notes, or you could ask your carer, a relative or friend to help you write the diary.

Remember to make a note of all the times you need help during the day or the night or both. This can include help that you need indoors and outdoors. It doesn’t matter what activity you are doing – you might be shopping, visiting friends or family, going to a religious activity, or doing a hobby such as gardening. If you need help to do any of these things because of your sight loss or other disability it can count for AA.

A diary with times and dates can provide a compelling picture of your needs over an average day. Send your care diary to the DWP together with your AA claim pack.

Below you will find an example to show how you might keep a diary and the sort of things you might include.

## Diary of a woman with sight loss who lives with her husband

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 7.15am to 7.20am | Wake up. My husband lays my slippers out for me. |
| 7.20am to 7.30am | Put the kettle on but my husband makes the tea – even though I have a gadget to help with pouring I still burn myself. My husband says it’s not safe for me to do that anymore. |
| 7.30am to 8.15am | Get washed and dressed. Check with my husband that the colours of the clothes I have on look OK together. My husband acts as a mirror to check I have styled my hair properly. |
| 8.15am to 8.35am | Cereal for breakfast. My husband pours the cereal and milk in the bowl as I can’t see to do this. I tend to spill it everywhere. |
| 8.45am to 9.35am | Post arrives – my husband reads out what post has come for me. My husband then puts in my talking newspaper in the CD player so that I can listen to it. |
| 10.30am to 10.35am | Need help with another cup of tea. |
| 11.15am | My daughter arrives so that my husband can go and do the local shopping. |
| 12.45pm to 3.15pm | I go with my husband to the local blind club for lunch. He checks my appearance before we go out. I put on my overcoat, but I do not get the buttoning right. My husband guides me to the car. He then helps me out when we reach the centre and helps me inside the building. At the lunch table my husband cuts up my food. It’s chicken and Yorkshire puddings today. I put what I think is broccoli in my mouth and start chewing and then realise its cauliflower. I hate cauliflower! After lunch my husband helps me to the hall where there is a guest speaker who has come to talk to us about the use of CCTVs. |
| 3.40 to 4pm | Back home and having a cup of tea. |
| 4 to 5pm | Listen to the TV. One of my favourite quiz shows is on. I can’t see what the people are wearing or what the scores are – it’s all blurry to me. |
| 5.10pm | My husband puts one of my talking books into the machine. I have so many talking books on CD that he has to search through them all to find the one I want to listen to today. |
| 6.30pm to 7.30pm | My husband cooks tea and brings it to the table. He tells me where everything is on the plate. When I have finished, he tells me I have spilt sauce on my top. He helps me to find clean clothes and checks my appearance. |
| 7.30pm to 7.35pm | Ask my husband to look in the paper to check what programs are on the TV tonight. |
| 7.35pm to 9.30pm | Watch TV or should I say listen. |
| 10pm | Wash and get ready for bed. Check with my husband which clothes are dirty and should go into the laundry basket. |

### If your claim is successful

After your claim you will be sent a letter to tell you the result. If you are successful, you may qualify for other benefits. This is because of the additional amounts or premiums that can be paid to claimants who get AA.

You may qualify for Pension Credit or Housing Benefit if you pay rent. If you already get these benefits tell the offices that pay these once you start getting AA. If you don’t already get them, you may be able to get them once you are awarded AA.

### If your claim is turned down, do not give up

Sometimes the DWP makes the wrong decision, even if you have filled out your claim pack well. You can ask the DWP to look at their decision again if you are unhappy with it and wish to dispute it. This is called a “**mandatory reconsideration**” and must be requested by you within **one month** of the DWP’s initial decision. If you can, you should send the DWP any additional evidence you have, like a supporting letter from a medical professional or a support worker you are in regular contact with, to help your case.

After the DWP have reconsidered their original decision, they will notify you of the new decision. If you are still unhappy with the outcome and wish to dispute it, you can then lodge an appeal with HM Courts and Tribunals Service. Normally, appeals must be lodged within one month of the decision following the mandatory reconsideration. For further information on the appeals process, please see our “Benefits appeals” factsheet.

## How we can help

If you would like any more information about Attendance Allowance, you can speak to our Advice service by calling our Helpline. Our advisors can also carry out a full benefit check with you and give you advice about applying for other benefits you may be missing out on.

Our Welfare Benefit Sight Loss Advisors are available to offer help if you would like to challenge a benefit decision or think you should be awarded more than you have been. Our advisers can help you with the mandatory reconsideration and First-Tier Tribunal (appeals) process.

RNIB’s Legal Rights service is available to offer you help with more complex benefit queries and appeals, such as those to the Upper Tribunal, once the initial appeals process to the First Tier Tribunal has been completed.

### RNIB Helpline

If you need someone who understands sight loss, call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999**, say **“Alexa, call RNIB Helpline”** to an Alexa-enabled device, or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**. Our opening hours are weekdays from 8am – 8pm and Saturdays from 9am – 1pm.

### Sight Advice FAQ

Sight Advice FAQ answers questions about living with sight loss, eye health or being newly diagnosed with a sight condition. It is produced by RNIB in partnership with other sight loss organisations. **sightadvicefaq.org.uk**

### Connect with others

Meet or connect with others who are blind or partially sighted online, by phone or in your community to share interests, experiences and support for each other. From book clubs and social groups to sport and volunteering, our friendly, helpful and knowledgeable team can link you up with opportunities to suit you. Visit **rnib.org.uk/connect** or call **0303 123 9999**.

The factsheet gives general guidance only and is not an authoritative statement of the law.



**RNIB Legal Rights Service**

April 2024

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