

Attendance Allowance



Attendance Allowance is a cash benefit that can be claimed by people over 65 with a disability or long-term health condition.

It does not matter how much other income or savings you have. If you are awarded Attendance Allowance you can spend it in any way you wish. Many people do not realise they might be entitled, and could be missing out on a great deal of extra help.

This leaflet explains how you might qualify for Attendance Allowance and has lots of practical advice about making a claim.

Are you
missing out
on it?

What is Attendance Allowance?

Attendance Allowance (AA) is a weekly benefit paid to help people for the extra costs associated with having a disability or long-term health condition.

Your health problems may be physical (heart condition, joint problems), sensory (hearing or sight loss) or mental-health related (depression or memory loss). Any of these conditions could result in care needs. Many people have a combination of different disabling conditions.

Attendance Allowance is not means tested and is tax-free. It will not reduce any other income you receive. In fact, if you are awarded AA you may become entitled to other benefits, such as Pension Credit or Council Tax Benefit, or an increase in those benefits.

AA is paid at two rates:

- the lower rate of £44.85 per week is paid if you need help frequently during the day **or** during the night
- the higher rate of £67 per week is paid if you need help during **both** the day **and** night.

The rates above apply from April 2008–March 2009.



Who can claim?

You need to be over 65 and to have a disability or long-term health condition that means that you need care from another person.

It does not matter whether you actually receive any help or not, as long as you require help because of your disability or health condition. For example, you might have severe arthritis in your hands, making washing, dressing and preparing food and drink difficult. If you live alone you probably manage to do all the tasks without help, but it is very difficult and takes you a long time. This might mean that you reasonably require help even though none is provided, and you might qualify for Attendance Allowance.

You usually have to need help for six months before AA can be awarded but awards to terminally ill applicants can be fast tracked.

If you have recently spent a long time in hospital (over four weeks) or if you live in a care home you may not be able to get AA. If your disability or health condition began before you were 65 and you already get Disability Living Allowance (DLA), then you cannot claim AA as well.

In these situations you might want to contact your local Age Concern ► [back page](#) to take further advice before claiming or to check you are receiving the correct amount of DLA.

Common worries

There are a number of myths about Attendance Allowance. Some of them are set out below and opposite. Do not talk yourself out of applying for help without checking what the situation really is.

‘I can wash and dress myself. I’ve been told I don’t qualify’

You might qualify if you can only do these things with difficulty, or if they take you a very long time. Or, if you have a mental health problem or memory loss, you might need someone with you to ensure you are safe. There are many different disabilities and health conditions that may lead to entitlement to AA.

‘I have too much savings or other income to claim AA’

AA is assessed purely on your disability or health condition and care needs. Your other income and financial circumstances do not matter.

‘I live alone – no one looks after me’

If you need help because of your disability or health condition you may qualify for AA. It does not matter if anyone helps you or not. You may prefer to manage alone, but it is your need for help that is relevant.



‘I don’t want to go into a care home’

AA is paid to help older people with a disability or health condition remain independent. The extra money can help you to stay in your own home. You will not have to pay a carer if you receive AA: you can spend the money in whatever way you want.

‘I will not be able to fill in the claim form myself’

AA is not paid automatically – you have to fill in a form to claim it. Your local Age Concern **▶ back page** may be able to help you complete the form. The Benefits Enquiry Line **▶ page 6** can give general advice on filling in the form.



‘I have claimed AA before, but it was refused’

If that claim was some time ago your condition might have worsened since then, so you might qualify now.

How to apply

You can get a claim pack for Attendance Allowance by phoning the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Benefit Enquiry Line – tel: 0800 88 22 00 (free call). If AA is awarded it will start from the date of this phone call, as long as you return the form within six weeks. The form is available in large print if you ask for it.

You can download and print out a form from the DWP website, but if you do this your claim will only start from the date your completed form is received by the DWP. You can also claim on-line at www.dwp.gov.uk/eservice. You will be directed to register with the Government electronic gateway at www.gateway.gov.uk before making your claim.

Most claims are decided solely by the information you put on the claim form, so it is important to clearly explain the problems you have because of your disabilities or health conditions. If you find writing difficult somebody else can fill in the form for you, but you normally have to sign it yourself.

Another person can claim on your behalf if you are mentally incapacitated or terminally ill. If a doctor certifies that you are terminally ill your claim will be assessed under a fast-track system, and you will automatically be awarded the higher rate. It does not matter if you have not needed help for six months if you are terminally ill.

What care needs count?

Each claim for Attendance Allowance is assessed individually. It is not paid automatically because you have a certain disability or health condition. Two people with the same disability or health condition may receive different levels of AA because they are differently affected.

To qualify for the lower rate of AA during the day you have to show that you either need:

- frequent attention throughout the day in connection with your bodily functions **or**
- continual supervision to avoid danger.

'Bodily functions' are things like moving around, eating, getting washed and dressed, going to the toilet, seeing or hearing. If it is difficult for you to do any of these things you could need help from another person. For example, you might need someone to check your clothes are clean or help with fastenings such as zips or shoelaces.

You may be struggling to do things unaided despite difficulties or pain, and you might have developed special ways of coping with certain activities. If an activity takes you much longer than it would somebody without your disability or health condition, or if it is difficult for you to do it safely, that can be taken into account. If you have to lead a restricted lifestyle because you do not get all the help you need, this should be taken into account.

It is more common to qualify for AA through the 'frequent attention throughout the day' rule. Even if you need supervision sometimes it can be difficult to show that you need 'continual supervision', unless you have a problem like dementia.

Common problems

Here are some examples of the kinds of things to include when explaining what sort of help you need.

Washing, bathing and looking after your appearance

Do you need help:

- getting in and out of the bath or shower?
- adjusting shower controls?
- shaving, putting on make-up, or washing, rinsing, drying or styling your hair?

Going to the toilet

Do you need help:

- adjusting or checking your clothing after using the toilet?
- finding the toilet and the wash basin in unfamiliar places?
- using the toilet during the night?
- if you have a toilet accident and need to change clothes or bedding?

Getting dressed or undressed

Do you need help:

- with fastenings, shoelaces, buttons, etc?
- from someone to tell you if a piece of clothing is on inside out or you are wearing odd socks?

Mealtimes

Do you need help:

- reading cooking instructions, recipes and use-by dates?
- using the cooker, microwave oven and any other kitchen equipment such as knives?

If someone cooks or prepares food for you that will not be taken into account for Attendance Allowance – you will have to explain the help you need to do it for yourself.

Help with medical treatment

Do you need help:

- to identify and sort out your tablets?
- to measure and pour liquid medicine?
- to read and understand instructions about taking medication?
- to manage diabetes, eg testing blood sugar, urine, monitoring and recording results or having insulin injections?
- to recognise if your condition deteriorates?
- to change batteries in your hearing aid?

Housework and cooking

Many older people require help with shopping, housework or other domestic tasks. The help you need to do these tasks can be relevant for Attendance Allowance as long as you can show that you carry out the task yourself with another person's help. For example, someone may come shopping with you to help you walk or reach items from the shelf for you. If you are blind or partially sighted, you may do your own hoovering but sometimes need another person to tell you where you need to clean. This sort of help should count.

Getting around indoors and outdoors

Do you need help:

- to get upstairs or downstairs safely?
- to cope with kerbs and steps, or to cross roads safely?
- to avoid getting lost or getting into danger in unfamiliar areas?
- to read bus numbers, timetables, identify train platforms or bus stops?



Filling in the claim form

Use the suggestions on [pages 7–9](#) as a guide, but make sure you give plenty of information in your own words about your personal circumstances.

Do not underestimate your needs. Most people find that a positive attitude makes it easier to live with a disability or health condition. However, just on this occasion, try really hard to think of all the things that you cannot do or have trouble with because of your condition.

Describe any accidents or falls you have had. Try to remember where you fell, whether the fall could have been avoided and if you needed help afterwards, for example to apply first aid.

Be sure to explain the effects of all your disabilities and health conditions, and how they interact with each other. Has your health got worse recently? Have you found it hard to adapt? Say if you have had a bereavement, or recently moved to a new home.

Focus on frequency

To qualify for the lower rate of Attendance Allowance you have to show that you need help ‘frequently’ during the day **or** during the night. 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.

Keep a care diary

A care diary can be a good way to demonstrate the sort of help you need and how often you need it. 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 to keep a diary of all the times that you needed help over a few days, indoors and outdoors. Even if you only need assistance for a few moments each time, the different types of help do add up.

It does not matter what activity you are doing – you might be shopping, visiting friends or family, going to a religious activity, or following a hobby such as gardening. If you need help to do any of these things because of your disability it can count for Attendance Allowance. If you keep a diary send it in with your claim form.

A night time diary can also be useful if you are applying for the higher rate of AA.

What if your application is turned down?

If your claim for AA is unsuccessful, ask an independent agency, like Age Concern [▶ back page](#) or the Citizens Advice Bureau, for advice about whether you should challenge the decision. For details of your local CAB call 020 7833 2181 (this national call rate number gives local contact details only, not advice).

Remember that your needs may change and increase. Even if you are not eligible for AA now you may be able to claim successfully in the future.

How Age Concern can help

The Age Concern Information Line and website offer a wide range of information on issues affecting older people. Call us free on 0800 00 99 66 or visit www.ageconcern.org.uk

If you live in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, contact your national Age Concern.

- **Age Concern Northern Ireland**

Tel: 028 9024 5729 (national call rate)

Website: www.ageconcernni.org

- **Scottish Helpline for Older People (Age Concern Scotland)**

Tel: 0845 125 9732 (lo-call rate)

Websites:

www.olderpeoplescotland.org.uk

www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk

- **Age Concern Cymru**

Tel: 029 2043 1555 (national call rate)

Website: www.accymru.org.uk

Your local Age Concern provides a wide range of services for older people. Contact details may be in the box below. If not, call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call).

