

Factsheet B9: Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

This is a benefit for people of working age who are unable to work because of ill-health or disability.

There are two types of Employment and Support Allowance:

- A **contribution based** benefit for people who have been working and have paid enough National Insurance contributions, if they pass the Work Capability Test (which is described below)
- A **means-tested** benefit for people who have not paid enough National Insurance Contributions, but can still pass the Work Capability Test

Please note that the means-tested type of Employment and Support Allowance has been replaced by Universal Credit for new claimants at some point during 2016-2018. This will also affect anyone already on an existing benefit at some time from late 2019 up to 2023. And there is a new way to claim the contribution based benefit, which is known as 'new style' Employment and Support Allowance.

You need to phone the Jobcentre claim line 0800 055 6688 to register a new claim. From 2019 you should phone 0800 328 5644 to claim 'new style' Employment and Support Allowance.

Your doctor needs to have signed you off as 'not fit for work' so you will be asked for your fit note. There is a new digital method of submitting a fit note – see our Factsheet: DWP Digital send your fit note service.

Some basic information will be taken over the phone to check your



identity and basic entitlement, and your claim starts from this point.

You then move into the assessment period, during which they will send you a questionnaire to complete, called an ESA50. This allows you to explain your health condition and functional difficulties (such as difficulties with walking or coping with change), and you may also be asked to attend a Work Capability Assessment at Baltic House in Norwich. This will be carried out by a health professional employed by Atos Healthcare (now known as Independent Assessment Services, or IAS) on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions.

The health professional will write a report using the information from your ESA50 questionnaire and from their own questions and observations during your assessment appointment. They can obtain further medical evidence from your GP or consultant, but they will not usually do that if they think they can complete an assessment without it. If you already have letters or reports from your GP or consultant, when you go to your assessment you can always give the health professional a copy (or ask them to take a copy). The Atos report is sent back to someone called a 'decision-maker' at the Department of Work and Pensions, who will make the final decision about whether you are entitled to Employment and Support Allowance.

See our Factsheets about [How to Deal with Medical Assessments](#), and [How to Get Medical Evidence](#).

Please note that until you receive a decision that you have passed the Work Capability Test, you will only receive the assessment rate of Employment and Support Allowance, which is the same amount of money as Jobseeker's Allowance.



If you qualify for Employment and Support Allowance, you will be placed into either the 'work related activity group' or the 'support group'. You will receive more money if you have been allocated to the support group. (Some people used to get more money in the work related activity group as well, but this has now stopped for new claims).

There are specific Factsheets on Employment and Support Allowance and the Work Related Activity Group, and on Employment and Support Allowance and the Support Group.

If you have been placed in the work related activity group and you are getting contribution based Employment and Support Allowance (because you have paid enough National Insurance Contributions), you will only receive this for 52 weeks. After this, Employment and Support Allowance payments can only continue if you pass a means-test, which means you will not receive money if they decide your household already has enough money to live on from other income and savings.

Most people will find they have been placed in the work related activity group. This is designed to help you prepare for your eventual return to work. It does not involve looking for work, but is designed to explore any barriers that exist for you, and to see if there is support available to help you overcome those barriers. Examples of this include looking at what 'reasonable adjustments' you might need in the workplace such as help with special equipment or allowing you to work in a different way, or providing help for you to re-train.

The work related activity that you will be asked to do can be agreed between yourself and a Work Coach at the Jobcentre, and you may also be asked to



attend something called the Work and Health Programme, which is a voluntary programme targeted at people who need more help. See the list of eligible claimants at <https://www.gov.uk/work-health-programme>. There is more information about this on our Factsheet specifically about Employment and Support Allowance and the Work Related Activity Group.

If you are sent an appointment letter, you must at least go to the appointment to discuss what you can and can't do. If you cannot attend an appointment, you need to call them and explain why. You are allowed to re-arrange appointments if you have good reason. Otherwise you risk having your benefit cut (they call it being sanctioned). This means they can substantially reduce your weekly payments.

If you have been placed in the work related activity group and you think this is wrong, you can appeal the decision within one calendar month. You need to provide them with further evidence that shows why you should be in the support group. For more information see our Factsheet that is specifically about Employment and Support Allowance and the Support Group, and our Factsheet on Reconsiderations and Appeals.

If you require further information or would like this Factsheet in an alternative format you can contact us by calling: 01508 491210, by emailing: info@equallives.org.uk, or by writing to: Equal Lives, 15 Manor Farm Barns, Fox Road, Framingham Pigot, Norfolk, NR14 7PZ.

