

# Employment and Support Allowance (ESA): further guidance on the Work Capability Assessment and Capability for Work questionnaire

The Work Capability Assessment has two aims:

- It assesses whether you have a limited capability for work. If you do, you can stay on ESA.
- It assesses whether you have a limited capability for work-related activity. This is used to decide whether you are placed in the support group or the work-related activity group.

A points system is used to see how well you can carry out a range of activities. Each activity is divided into different 'descriptors', which explain tasks of varying degrees of difficulty. You will score points if you're not able to perform a task safely, to an acceptable standard, as often as you need to and in a reasonable time.

## Section 1. The limited capability for work assessment: the points

To be assessed as having a limited capability for work, you need to score 15 points or more. Add together the highest score from each activity heading that applies to you. If any of the tasks marked in *italic* apply, you will also satisfy the limited capability for work-related activity assessment (in which case any contributory ESA payable will not be limited to just 12 months).

The assessment takes into account your abilities when using any aid or appliance you would normally or could reasonably use.

### 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

- A. *Cannot unaided by another person 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.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot, unaided by another person, mount or descend two steps even with the support of a handrail. **9 points**
- C. Cannot, unaided by another person, 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.* **9 points**
- D. Cannot, unaided by another person, 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.* **6 points**
- E. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## 2. Standing and sitting

- A. *Cannot move between one seated position and another seated position which are located next to one another without receiving physical assistance from another person.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot, for the majority of the time, remain at a work station:  
(i) standing unassisted by another person (even if free to move around)  
(ii) sitting (even in an adjustable chair), **or**  
(iii) a combination of paragraphs (i) and (ii)  
for more than 30 minutes, before needing to move away in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion. **9 points**
- C. Cannot, for the majority of the time, remain at a work station:  
(i) standing unassisted by another person (even if free to move around)  
(ii) sitting (even in an adjustable chair), **or**  
(iii) a combination of paragraphs (i) and (ii)  
for more than an hour before needing to move away in order to avoid significant discomfort or exhaustion. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## 3. Reaching

- A. *Cannot raise either arm as if to put something in the top pocket of a coat or jacket.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot raise either arm to top of head as if to put on a hat. **9 points**
- C. Cannot raise either arm above head height as if to reach for something. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## 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.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot pick up and move a one litre carton full of liquid. **9 points**
- C. Cannot transfer a light but bulky object such as an empty cardboard box. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## 5. Manual dexterity

- A. *Cannot press a button (such as a telephone keypad) with either hand or cannot turn the pages of a book with either hand.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot pick up a £1 coin or equivalent with either hand. **15 points**

- C. Cannot use a pen or pencil to make a meaningful mark with either hand. **9 points**
- D. Cannot single-handedly use a suitable keyboard or mouse. **9 points**
- E. None of the above applies. **0 points**
- 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.* **15 points**
- B. Has significant difficulty conveying a simple message to strangers. **15 points**
- C. Has some difficulty conveying a simple message to strangers. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**
- 7. Understanding communication by:**  
**(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) 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, such as the location of a fire escape, due to sensory impairment.* **15 points**
- B. Has significant difficulty understanding a simple message from a stranger due to sensory impairment. **15 points**
- C. Has some difficulty understanding a simple message from a stranger due to sensory impairment. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**
- 8. Navigation and maintaining safety, using a guide dog or other aid if either or both are normally used or could reasonably be used**
- A. Unable to navigate around familiar surroundings, without being accompanied by another person, due to sensory impairment. **15 points**
- B. Cannot safely complete a potentially hazardous task such as crossing the road, without being accompanied by another person, due to sensory impairment. **15 points**
- C. Unable to navigate around unfamiliar surroundings, without being accompanied by another person, due to sensory impairment. **9 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

**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.**

- 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. **15 points**
- 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. **6 points**
- C. None of the above applies. **0 points**

**10. Consciousness during waking moments**

- A. At least once a week, has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness resulting in significantly disrupted awareness or concentration. **15 points**
- B. At least once a month, has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness resulting in significantly disrupted awareness or concentration. **6 points**
- C. Neither of the above applies. **0 points**

**11. Learning tasks**

- A. *Cannot learn how to complete a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot learn anything beyond a simple task, such as setting an alarm clock. **9 points**
- C. Cannot learn anything beyond a moderately complex task, such as the steps involved in operating a washing machine to clean clothes. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

**12. Awareness of everyday hazards (such as boiling water or sharp objects)**

- 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 the claimant requires supervision for the majority of the time to maintain safety.* **15 points**
- 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 the claimant frequently requires supervision to maintain safety. **9 points**

- 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 the claimant occasionally requires supervision to maintain safety. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

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

- A. *Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least two sequential personal actions.* **15 points**
- B. Cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least two sequential personal actions for the majority of the time. **9 points**
- C. Frequently cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least two sequential personal actions. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

**14 Coping with change**

- A. *Cannot cope with any change to extent that day-to-day life cannot be managed.* **15 points**
- 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 **9 points**
- C. Cannot cope with minor unplanned change (such as the timing of an appointment on the day it is due to happen), to the extent that, overall, day-to-day life is made significantly more difficult. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

**15 Getting about**

- A. Cannot get to any place outside of the claimant's home with which the claimant is familiar. **15 points**
- B. Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is familiar, without being accompanied by another person. **9 points**
- C. Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is unfamiliar without being accompanied by another person. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## 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 claimant.* **15 points**
- 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 claimant. **9 points**
- 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 claimant. **6 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## 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.* **15 points**
- B. Frequently has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace. **15 points**
- C. Occasionally has uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour that would be unreasonable in any workplace. **9 points**
- D. None of the above applies. **0 points**

## Section 2: The limited capability for work-related activity assessment

If one or more of the following descriptors applies to you, you will be assessed as having a limited capability for work-related activity and will be placed in the support group of claimants.

### 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 appendix)**  
Cannot pick up and move a 0.5 litre carton full of liquid.
- 5. Manual dexterity**  
Cannot press a button (such as a telephone keypad) with either hand or cannot 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 by:**  
**(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) a 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, such as the location of a fire escape, due to sensory impairment.
- 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 the claimant requires 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 two 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 claimant.

### **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 or 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.

## **Section 3. Capability for work questionnaire: advice and example responses**

Here we look at some of the activity headings in the questionnaire in more detail and provide some example responses. The headings used here are sometimes worded differently to those in Appendix 2 and 3, where we give the exact wording of the law.

**Activities 1–10 cover physical functions.**

### **Moving round and using steps (Activity 1 in Appendix 2)**

This includes using aids like crutches, a walking stick or a manual wheelchair (but not an electric wheelchair), if you normally or could reasonably use them. So if, for example, you cannot use crutches or a stick because it would be too painful or difficult, or if you don't use a manual wheelchair because it wouldn't make getting around any easier, then you should explain why.



Most people with Parkinson's experience problems with moving around. They may not be able to physically move, or may feel so tired out by doing so that they need to stabilise themselves by leaning on furniture. Some people may feel so sick, exhausted and 'off' that they have to lie down often.

**Example response:**

*"On most days, I can stand and move using walking sticks and manage about 20 to 30 metres, before I need to stop due to tiredness. I then need to sit down for five to ten minutes. My condition changes from day to day, and sometimes I can't move very well at all. I fall often if I don't use my walking sticks, and my balance is badly affected."*

**Picking up and moving things (Activity 4 in Appendix 2)**

This looks at your ability to pick up and move light objects (such as a carton of liquid or an empty cardboard box). You may have a tendency to drop such things, due to poor grip or tremor. If you have dropped such items in the past, write down what happened. This way, you may be able to show that you cannot perform the task in question reliably.

**Example response:**

*"My grip in both hands is poor, and on most days I have tremor. Trying to drink a glass of juice at mealtimes can be very difficult and I end up spilling most of it."*

**Manual dexterity (Activity 5 in Appendix 2)**

This test is assessing whether you can manage the tasks with either hand. Some people with Parkinson's may have problems with their grip and fine finger movements. Tremor can also cause problems with manual dexterity.

**Example response:**

*"Because of my tremor I cannot use my computer anymore. I press the wrong keys and end up typing nonsense. I cannot use the mouse, and keep managing to delete anything I have typed. My daughter tells me she cannot read my handwriting."*

**Communicating – speaking, writing and typing (Activity 6 in Appendix 2)**

This may be relevant if your condition affects your speech and you also have difficulties in writing or typing. It asks if you can convey a simple message through any of these means. So, if you think this applies, you should give details of all difficulties with speech, writing, typing and any other means (for example, texting on a mobile phone) explaining why this is difficult. Even if you have already mentioned dexterity problems in Activity 5, you should mention them here too, as the test is different.

**Example response:**

*"I find verbal communication very difficult. My voice is very quiet and sometimes my speech is slurred. I also find it hard to type or write because of tremor."*

**Controlling your bowels or bladder and using a collecting device (Activity 9 in Appendix 2)**

Some people with Parkinson's will develop problems with their bladder and bowels, such as incontinence. Some people may also have problems reaching the toilet in time, due to difficulties with movement. Some people with Parkinson's may need to use continence pads, or need someone to help them go to the toilet.

**Example response:**

*"I have a lot of difficulty with bladder and bowel problems. I have to visit the toilet several times during the night. This can be incredibly difficult, because sometimes I can't move quickly enough to get to the toilet on time and I have an accident. My daughter needs to clean up afterwards. She needs to do this about once a week."*

**Activities 11–18 cover mental, cognitive and intellectual functions.**

### **Learning how to do tasks (Activity 11 in Appendix 2)**

This might apply if you have memory problems.

#### **Example response:**

*“Parkinson’s has caused me to have memory problems, so I have difficulty remembering instructions I have just been given. Even if someone tells me how to do something two or three times, I tend to forget. I need visual prompts, such as notices around the house to remind me to do everyday tasks. Learning anything beyond a simple task is now beyond me.”*

### **Awareness of hazards or danger (Activity 12 in Appendix 2)**

This may apply if your concentration has been affected, so you are less aware of potential risks. Mention any accidents you have had because of this and list any injuries you sustained as a result. Also, if you don’t attempt certain activities because of the risks, then say so and explain why.

#### **Example response:**

*“My mind tends to wander and I can forget that I have started doing something. I left a pan of beans on the hob last month and it burnt dry. Fortunately a neighbour noticed before fire took hold. Three weeks ago I turned on the bath taps and flooded the bathroom. My daughter comes round several times a week now, to ensure I am safe.”*

### **Coping with social situations (Activity 16 in Appendix 2)**

Some people with Parkinson’s may get extremely anxious or distressed meeting people and may need constant support to engage. This may be due to cognitive issues, such as dementia.

#### **Example response:**

*“Anxiety is a symptom of Parkinson’s and I experience this quite often, especially when in crowds of people. Because I often ‘freeze’ this makes anxiety a lot worse, so social situations are difficult for me. I have difficulty making facial expressions because of rigid facial muscles. This makes it difficult to express my emotions, and I am often misunderstood. I am no longer able to mix with people I do not know.”*

### **Eating and drinking (Activities 15 and 16 in Appendix 3)**

This relates to your ability to get food and drink to your mouth without help and also your ability to chew and swallow food. It may be difficult to put food or drink to your mouth because of tremor or weakness. Some people with Parkinson’s will need help to eat food or drink, because of swallowing problems, which can cause choking. They may also need prompting because of memory problems.

#### **Example response:**

*“I have problems eating because I have swallowing problems. This causes a fear of choking, so I don’t eat unless I have help, which has led to weight loss. I use various aids and appliances to help me eat and often need help to cut up food, as I find it difficult to grip cutlery.”*