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Completing the DLA claim form

This factsheet provides a step-by-step guide to completing the Disability Living Allowance claim form. The headings below correspond to the sections of the form that you will need to complete.

Walking outdoors

You need to pass this section to get the higher level of mobility component. To qualify you must be unable to walk for more than 50 yards without severe discomfort. This is also related to the time, speed, manner and distance which you are capable of walking. For example if you walk slowly or stagger and need support, is it possible to argue that you are virtually unable to walk?

The award will only be made to people whose walking is affected by a physical impairment, not because of mental illness.

Having someone with you when you are outdoors

This section relates to the lower level of mobility component. To qualify you will need guidance and supervision when walking outside in areas that you are not familiar with as well as those that you are. In particular it is important to draw attention to:

Any problems with memory or concentration that may:

- Cause you to forget where you are going
- Affect your ability to read maps or understand road names
- Affect your road sense, making you a danger to yourself and/or others

Any behavioural problems that cause:

- Inappropriate behaviour or language
- Physical or verbal aggression
- Panic attacks or distress
- Dizziness or balance problems

Any sensory problems that cause:

- Visual or hearing impairments
- Distorted spacial awareness
- Double vision
- Light sensitivity

You can also be awarded this lower level of mobility if you need supervision or guidance because of mental health problems such as fear and anxiety.

factsheet

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Falls or stumbles

You may have balance problems, fatigue or weakness that cause you to fall or stumble. Perhaps you are unable to lift your feet up properly, causing your feet to catch on uneven surfaces and trips you up. If you do have balance problems these will occur both inside and outside, and as they are unpredictable the problem will be ongoing and daily. List any injuries and medical treatment required because of a fall or stumble. You should also mention if you have any distress or confusion getting back up from a fall.

Moving about indoors

Problems with balance, tiredness or weakness can affect your ability to move about indoors. Think about how you move about on stairs and when getting out of chairs. You may have already used an example earlier in your application about any of these problems, which you will need to repeat here.

Getting out of bed in the morning and into bed at night

You may have problems getting out of bed in the morning if, for example, your balance problems are worse at this time. You may have difficulty pulling the bedclothes over you. Or you may be unable to distinguish day from night, and find it difficult to judge when to sleep. You should also draw attention to any symptoms of fatigue or depression that stop you from going to bed at night or from getting out of bed in the morning.

When you are in bed

You may have problems sleeping if you are anxious or depressed, or wake up anxious forgetting where you are and need assurances. You may endanger yourself by falling asleep with lit cigarettes.

Help with your toilet needs

Write down any problems you may have with managing clothing and wiping. Balance problems can also make you unsafe when getting off the toilet. If you find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning you should write this down. The Benefits Agency can suggest that you should use a commode or urine bottle, so state if emptying this would be difficult for you.

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Washing, bathing and looking after your appearance

You may have problems getting in and out of the bath or washing and drying. It is also important to state if you need reminding to look after your personal hygiene. If being prompted to wash makes you angry, write this down.

Getting dressed or undressed

You may have problems with buttons, shoelaces and zips. Think about whether you are able to bend and reach to clothe yourself. Again it is important to state if you need reminding to wear clean clothes. If this makes you angry, make sure you write this down.

Preparing a cooked main meal for yourself

This refers to cooking a meal from scratch using fresh ingredients. If you can only use microwave meals then you have problems with preparing yourself a cooked meal. This also refers to problems with memory and concentration. Perhaps you cannot follow and understand recipes or 'use by' dates, or forget that you are cooking and burn the meal. If you have lost your sense of smell, this means you will not be able to tell when something is burning. If you have physical weakness that causes you to drop things, make sure you write this down.

At mealtimes

Problems with appetite loss or weight gain should be stated. Note down if you need encouragement to eat, or discouragement not to eat, and if this causes any anger outbursts. Another difficulty may be weakness which makes it difficult to use cutlery.

Help with medical treatment

If you have problems remembering your medication, or have had any previous accidental overdoses, write this down. Also, any weakness which makes it difficult to open medication containers should be noted, as well as any side effects.

Someone to keep an eye on you

The main things to mention are memory and concentration. You may also be physically aggressive and need restraining. Any destructive behaviour including punching walls and furniture, should be included.

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Dizzy spells, blackouts, fits, seizures or something like this

Dizzy spells and blackouts are common symptoms of brain injury. If you suffer from these problems, make sure that you detail the following:

- Their unpredictable nature
- The lack of warning
- The variance of severity. For example, you may have infrequent Grand Mal seizures, but almost daily Petit Mals or absences
- Their frequency
- The recovery period after each episode
- Any problems at night time, e.g. that may necessitate bedding or clothing being changed

The way you feel because of your mental health

Unfortunately this is the only section that addresses most of the symptoms of a brain injury. Make sure that you stress the following:

- If you are unable to cope with changes to your daily routine
- Any feelings of depression or isolation, and the effects of this
- If things like prompting washing cause you to become aggressive
- Any erratic behaviour and mood swings, and how frequent these are
- Extent of any physical or verbal aggression and whether this has led to any police involvement
- Any Social Services involvement because of neglect
- Any hospitalisation as a result of any of the above

Communicating with other people

This section is asking you to detail any problems you may have with speech and language, and understanding conversations or written instructions. This may also be caused by problems with concentration, memory, and being unable to tolerate noisy environments.

Help you need when going out during the day or in the evening

This section concerns going out in areas you are not familiar with, as well as those that you are. Difficulties with balance, memory and anxiety can all cause problems when going outside. You will need to show that you need help to live as normal a life as possible. Going to places such as clubs, pubs, Doctors and the Church all need to be included. Assistance with going out is essential, otherwise you can end up isolated from your community.

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Any other information

You should write down here information about any counsellors or hospital appointments that you need to see or attend. This is the ideal opportunity to write about anything that may have missed earlier, for example the delayed effects that physical exertion can have on you a day or two later.

Further Information

When undergoing assessments for various benefits, remember to stress what you can't do, rather than what you can do. Many people have benefits denied to them that they are entitled to because they have been too keen to prove that they are fit and well.

Remember to photocopy all of the forms that you fill in, as this will be useful if you need to appeal against the decision, or renew your claim in future.

Our booklet 'Welfare Benefits after brain injury' explains all of the areas covered here in more detail, as well as other benefits that may be available. We recommend that you always seek professional advice when claiming benefits - your local Citizens Advice Bureau can usually offer help, and sometimes local Headway groups and branches can as well. **If you would like to discuss any of the issues covered here, or any other aspects of brain injury, please call our free, confidential helpline on 0808 800 2244. Alternatively, you can email us on helpline@headway.org.uk.**

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