

Derbyshire Welfare Rights Service

Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit

Completing the ESA50 or UC50 Form

This advice is based on the version of the ESA50 dated May 2018 and the UC50 dated December 2017

Completing forms can be difficult and sometimes tedious, but a carefully-completed ESA50/UC50 form ('capability for work questionnaire') can ensure that the correct benefit award is made as quickly as possible.

It is important to answer all the questions that apply to you clearly and fully, and to provide additional evidence – medical letters etc – where possible.

If there is sufficient detail in your responses on the form, it may allow a decision to be made on your claim without the need for a face-to-face medical assessment. If this happens, always check which ESA or UC group you have been placed in (see our advice leaflets on ESA or UC for details) and seek advice if you think the decision is wrong.

If the form does not allow you enough space, use the blank page at the end to add information. You may also add sheets to the form if you need to give extra information, but make sure your name and National Insurance Number are on them and that they are fixed to the form and can't get lost.

For the details of the ESA/UC scoring system, see the accompanying sheet which shows the criteria for 'limited capability for work' test and the 'limited capability for work-related activities' test.

Don't struggle alone with the form – If you need help, ask for it as soon as possible from your support worker, social worker, or an advice service such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

If you have needed help filling in the form – always give the reason why, and who has helped you. The problems you have with the form may be relevant to your claim, e.g. you cannot hold a pen, or you cannot concentrate sufficiently to complete it.

Giving your name/address etc - If you wish, you can ask that Jobcentre Plus contact someone else on your behalf if, for instance, you cannot manage paperwork or you have trouble using the phone or talking to strangers on the phone.

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Face to Face Assessment:

You may be asked to attend a face-to-face assessment with a healthcare professional. You are asked to give your contact details, and also to say if you need an interpreter or if you can provide your own interpreter (who must be over 16) or a BSL signer.

Also state if you would have any problems attending an assessment, e.g. if you cannot travel or use public transport, or would struggle with stairs, or you would need someone with you because you cannot go out alone.

It is possible to ask for the assessment to be done as a home-visit, but you will need written support from your GP for this.

You should also give any times or dates in the next 3 months when you cannot go to a face-to-face assessment.

It is very important to attend the assessment, as if you don't attend, your benefit could stop. You will be asked to provide 'good cause' why you did not attend; if your illness could affect your ability to attend an appointment, it is very important to say so in the form. Seek help if you have problems attending an appointment.

The assessment does not give the final decision on your claim (and it isn't an appeal hearing) A decision will be made by a 'Decision Maker' at the Department for Work and Pensions, and you have the right to challenge this decision.

Your GP and other health professionals - The form asks who your GP is - you can also give details of anyone else who is helping you: always give details of the person who knows you and your condition best.

If you are having cancer treatment – You may be accepted for benefit on the basis of this treatment, so give as much detail as possible, including if you are having, waiting for or recovering from chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer, and also if you are terminally ill, (when death can reasonably be expected in the next 6 months).

There is also a section at the end of the form which can be completed by your GP, a hospital doctor or clinical nurse who can give more details of your treatment.

About your illness or disabilities - there is a whole page early in the form which asks you to say what illness, disability or condition you have, when it started, if it varies over time, and how.

Giving full details (and supporting evidence from your GP etc. where you have it) here can help your claim as there are several conditions and types of treatment which mean that you will be accepted as having 'limited capability for work'.

For instance if:

- You have a 'notifiable disease' (a disease that you must by law report to the authorities, to

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- prevent it spreading) – this is relatively rare, and your GP will have advised you about this if it applies
- You suffer from a life-threatening uncontrolled disease
- You are a hospitable inpatient or recovering from treatment as an inpatient
- You are receiving or recovering from specific treatment such as renal dialysis, plasmapheresis
- (blood purification treatment), radiotherapy, or parenteral nutrition (intravenous feeding)
- You are pregnant or have recently given birth and in the period from 6 weeks before the birth to 2 weeks after baby is born
- You are pregnant and there would be a serious risk to your or the baby's health if you were found capable of work

Questions later in the form may ask again about these things – there is no problem with mentioning them wherever they are relevant.

You should also list any aids you use (such as a wheelchair or hearing aids etc) in your daily life.

You should also show if your illness would mean that there would be a serious risk to your mental or physical health or that of others if you were found capable of work or if you were asked to do 'work-related activity' (see our ESA leaflet for what is meant by work-related activity).

Medication, hospital treatment etc - You will be asked to provide details of tablets or other medication you are taking, or you are due to start - and it is important to mention any side effects that you suffer or medication you were given that did not help you or made matters worse.

You should also give details of any hospital, clinic or special treatment you are having or you are due to have, as well as special treatment you are having, such as dialysis, whether this is in hospital or at home.

Make it clear if you are having treatment as a hospital inpatient or recovering from treatment as a hospital inpatient, as this means you may be treated as having 'limited capability for work'.

Drug and alcohol misuse - The form asks if you think drug (whether provided from your GP or other drugs), alcohol or substance misuse has played a part in your condition. If you are receiving treatment or you have been referred for help, please mention this here.

Things to think about when answering each question –

There are two sections, containing questions about physical health and mental health, all asking about how you manage with specific tasks such as walking, using your hands, arms and upper body, communicating, managing change in your daily life, coping with other people etc.

The questions are meant to assess your capability for work - they don't relate to any particular job, but are intended as 'work-related' tasks. It's important to reply to them carefully even if they seem a little odd to you.

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You will be asked to tick boxes to say whether or not you have problems managing each task – make sure you do this, but never leave it at that. Always give more detail that shows what problems you have – give examples where you can. Your answers should reflect how you are most of the time. Don't rely on examples of unusually good or bad days.

Most of the questions ask if your ability to do the task varies – if you tick 'it varies' please make sure you give details of what you mean by this – can you manage most of the time, or only part of the time, or hardly any of the time?

Also – when you consider your ability to do a task, think about whether you can do it not just as a one-off but repeatedly, safely and within a reasonable time. Will performing a task tire you out too much, does it cause pain or discomfort, does doing it mean you feel worse and have to move away and rest or go to bed? Will doing certain things cause you distress? Can you only do a task by taking a long time over it?

Part 1 of the form: Physical functions

Moving around and using steps

'Moving' includes using aids such as a manual (not electric) wheelchair, crutches or a walking stick, if you usually use any of them - but without the help of another person.

You will also be asked how far you can move out of doors on level ground, without needing to stop because of, for example, exhaustion, pain, breathlessness or lack of balance. Be clear about what happens when you walk and be clear about how far you can go, as the distance is important:

- 50 metres - about the length of 5 double-decker buses, or half a football pitch
- 100 metres - about the length of a football pitch
- 200 metres – two football pitches or 8 lengths of an average swimming pool

If you are not sure about gauging distances, seek help. Never guess the distance you can manage. Don't count walking you can do only accompanied by significant discomfort.

If you cannot move any more than 50 metres or you can't do so repeatedly, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group (in UC this is called Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity).

Using Steps

This question is testing whether you can go up or down two steps using a handrail (without the help of another person). It is part of the test of mobilising.

Standing and Sitting

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This tests if you can stand or sit 'at a work station' (a desk or something similar) and it looks at whether you can remain at the work station by standing and then sitting, without having to move away completely or lie down.

Time is important to this question – for how long can you stand? For how long can you sit (even in an adjustable chair)? What happens to you if you stand or sit for too long – do you suffer discomfort, pain, exhaustion?

If you need help from another person to move between one seated position and another, say so, and explain whether you need this help most of the time. This may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Reaching

This asks about your ability to reach up with either arm – so you may not score points for this test if you can do the task with one arm but not the other – and asks if you can 'lift at least one of your arms high enough to put something in the top pocket of a coat or jacket while you are wearing it' or if you can lift your arms above your head.

You should also mention if you cannot raise either arm to the top of your head as if you were putting on a hat.

If you cannot raise either arm as if to put something in the top pocket of a coat or jacket, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Picking up and moving things

This looks at your ability to do the task with your upper body and you are asked if you can pick up and move items such as a litre (two pint) carton full of liquid (if you can't do this, what about smaller cartons?), or a 'large light object' like arms, so it doesn't include bending.

Remember this is not related to any sort of job – think about if you can do the task repeatedly, safely etc. – would you be in pain, would you be slow in doing it, are your movements restricted or would they become restricted?

If you cannot pick and move up a 0.5 litre carton full of liquid, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Manual dexterity (using either hand)

You are asked if you can use either hand for tasks such as pressing a button (such as on a telephone keypad), turning the pages of a book, picking up a £1 coin, using a pen or pencil ('to make a meaningful mark') or use a suitable computer keyboard or mouse.

What effect would doing the task repeatedly have upon you? How limited is your use of your hands? Can you grip? Do you suffer tremors or pain that affect the use of your hands?

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If you cannot either press a button or turn the pages of a book with either hand, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Communicating with people

This task covers sight or hearing or a combination of both. If for instance you are profoundly deaf but you can see well, you should still score points on this question.

If you have problems dealing with people because of anxiety or other problems, you should give information about it in part 2 of the form where questions are asked about your ability to go out alone and manage social contact.

This question asks about your ability to give 'a simple message' (perhaps like 'The exit is over there') by speech, writing, typing or 'other means' (texting being an obvious one) to another person. Can you do so reliably, clearly and more than once without help?

If you have needed help with the form, say so here even if you have mentioned it before. If you cannot read and write well, or at all, is this related to your illness? If so, it is worth mentioning this.

If you cannot convey a simple message, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Other people communicating with you

This is about your ability to understand a simple message from someone you don't know.

If you are deaf, can you understand via lip-reading, without help? Can you do so most of the time? Are there any limitations on your lip-reading, e.g. is it only reliable with people you are used to?

Remember to say what help you need, e.g. if you need a BSL signer.

If you are visually impaired, what size print can you read, if any? Do light conditions or other things affect your ability to do this task reliably?

If you cannot understand a simple message owing to sensory impairment, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Getting around safely

This question is about 'navigating' safely owing to 'sensory impairment', so it applies if you have problems with your hearing, your sight or both — for instance using a guide dog or aids to sight such as glasses or contact lenses, or hearing aids.

If you have problems going out because of anxiety etc don't put the answer here but see 'Going Out' in part 2 of the form.

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Give information about your ability to get around without help – can you manage or would there be any danger to you? Can you manage in unfamiliar surroundings? Do you have problems even in familiar surroundings?

If you would encounter problems or danger crossing roads, please say so.

If you have problems going out because of anxiety or depression, make sure you answer the 'going out' question in part 2 of the form.

Controlling your bowels and bladder and using a collecting device

This is deeply personal, but if you have problems with this you do need to give the information requested. People can miss out on genuine entitlement because they are too embarrassed to admit how often this happens to them.

The question asks about how often you have problems (weekly/monthly/less than monthly).

Say what equipment you use, such as collection devices to help you manage your bowels or bladder, and if you suffer leakages from the device.

Say what help you may need from another person to manage problems, and if you need to change and wash clothes because of incontinence.

Mention also if you are at risk of incontinence and you need to stay close to a toilet, if this applies to you most of the time.

If you experience serious problems at least once a week, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Staying conscious when awake

This question asks about 'faints, fits and blackouts', diabetic hypos, the effects of epilepsy, etc. but you should also mention other episodes of altered awareness, confusion etc (not just fully lost consciousness) that are related to illness or disability, and any danger to yourself or others that is caused by this condition.

Part 2 of the form: Mental, cognitive and intellectual functions

This section applies to people who may have mental health problems, learning disabilities, or conditions relating to head or brain injuries etc.

Learning tasks

The examples given are learning a 'simple' task such as setting an alarm clock or a more complex task such as using a washing machine.

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If you need to be told repeatedly how to do the task or you usually forget, you should answer 'No' to the question.

Consider all the decisions that you need to make each time to set an alarm clock or operate a washing machine and to do the task properly and consistently.

Are there other regular daily tasks that you cannot learn to do or need help to do? Mention them here.

If you cannot learn how to complete a simple task, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Awareness of hazards or danger

You should answer this question if your awareness is reduced by mental health or other problems and so you may be liable to have accidents, cause danger, become distracted, act without thinking, even if you only realise any danger later on.

Give details whether or not you actually get any help with being made aware of hazards or danger. If you gave details about problems staying conscious when you are awake, the information will probably be relevant here too.

If your reduced awareness causes a significant risk of injury to yourself or others or damage to property or possessions and you need supervision for the majority of the time to maintain safety, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Starting and finishing tasks

This question is looking at your ability to organise personal actions, solve problems, or switch between tasks.

Think about everyday tasks such as washing, dressing, housework, appointments, dealing with letters and bills etc. - think about the whole process of planning, beginning and completing a task. Can you concentrate? Do you start a task but not finish it? Can you show why this happens? Can you do things in the right order? Do you need help to start, manage or complete a task every time or most of the time?

If you cannot reliably start or finish at least two personal actions, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

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Coping with change

Think about how you manage change in your daily life such as changes to your routine or changes to the times of appointments; if you cannot manage change at all, make this clear.

Think about how you cope with planned as well as unplanned changes – do you react badly if plans are changed or someone you are expecting is not on time? Do you have to prepare and plan things, and is it distressing to you if this plan goes wrong? For how long are you affected by your inability to cope with change – is it a short time or can it affect your day to day life?

If your inability to cope with change means that day to day life cannot be managed, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Going Out

This question looks at your ability to cope mentally with going out without help, or whether you need someone with you.

Take care to make it clear: can you go out alone for any purpose, or do you need someone with you most of the time or all the time? Even if you can manage to go alone to familiar places, what about places you don't know?

What happens to you if you try to go out – can you only manage the task at the price of panic attacks or feeling distressed afterwards?

Coping with social situations

This question looks at your ability to manage social situations without suffering distress.

If you cannot manage dealing with social contact without help or you do not socialise at all, answer 'no'.

Do you avoid company most of the time? Give examples of problems you have had dealing with people, either strangers or people you know. Explain if you can be near people but, for instance, you cannot talk to them because of feelings of distress.

If you go out, to the shops, to doctor's appointments etc but you do not engage with anyone that you do not have to, make this clear.

If you are always prevented from social contact because of difficulty relating to others or feelings of significant distress, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

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Behaving appropriately (with other people)

This question looks at what may happen if you have uncontrollable 'aggressive or disinhibited behaviour' that would be 'unreasonable in any workplace'.

This is relevant if for instance you would be unable to stop yourself displaying excessive behaviour (such as anger, shouting, crying, being abusive) in a work setting, if you can't respond correctly to other people (this could include not being able to communicate with them owing to mental health and other problems), you can't help reacting inappropriately to others or you display strange behaviour that you cannot control.

If you suffer daily uncontrollable episodes of aggressive or disinhibited behaviour, this may mean you are placed in the Support Group.

Eating and Drinking

Answering this question will help to decide if you belong in the Support Group. It includes your physical and mental ability to manage eating and drinking, such as if you need encouragement or prompting to eat and drink, if you suffer from an eating disorder, or if mental problems mean you suffer from confusion, distraction or forgetfulness or if you can't convey food and drink to your mouth without help from someone else.

Additional information can be found on our website, visit www.derbyshire.gov.uk/welfarebenefits

To keep up-to-date with benefit changes in Derbyshire go to
www.derbyshire.gov.uk/benefitnews

Benefits Helpline – 01629 531535 or email
welfarebenefits@derbyshire.gov.uk

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday
11.00am – 4.00pm