Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is a benefit for people who are too unwell to work. This factsheet explains how to claim ESA, how you will be assessed and how to challenge decisions.

- You can get ESA if you cannot work because of your illness.
- There are 2 types of ESA: contribution-based and income-related.
- To claim ESA you need a ‘fit note’ from your GP that says you are unwell.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will ask you to fill in a form with questions about your health. This is to see if you can work. You will normally have to go for a health assessment.
- If you get ESA, the DWP will put you in the ‘work-related activity group’ or the ‘support group’. This depends on how difficult it is for you to work.
- In the work-related activity group (WRAG), you have to go to meetings to talk about what support you need to work.
- In the support group, you don’t have to go to meetings and you get more money than you get in the WRAG.
- If you can’t get ESA then you may have to claim Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) instead.
- If you disagree with a decision about ESA, you can ask the DWP to look at it again. You can appeal if you do not agree with their second decision.
This factsheet covers:

1. **What is Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)?**
2. **How can I claim?**
3. **What is the Work Capability Assessment?**
4. **What are the groups of ESA?**
5. **Will I be re-assessed?**
6. **What is the Work Programme?**
7. **What is permitted work?**
8. **Can I appeal if I think a decision is wrong?**
9. **What if I have a relative who refuses to claim benefits?**
10. **Do I need to speak to a benefits adviser?**

### 1. What is Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)?

You can get ESA if you are not well enough to work. There are two different types of ESA:

- contribution-based, and
- income-related.

#### Contribution-based ESA

You can get contribution-based ESA (cbESA) if you paid enough National Insurance while you worked.¹ Your savings, income or the income of other people in your household does not affect how much you get. But if you get a pension this might reduce the amount of cbESA you get.²

cbESA is paid for up to 12 months, unless you go into the Support Group. After this you might get income-related ESA. If you are in the Support Group, you will continue to get cbESA after 12 months.³ There is more information about the groups of ESA in Section 4 of this factsheet.

#### Income-related ESA

If you can’t get cbESA you might get income-related ESA (irESA). You can get irESA if your household savings and income are low enough.

#### New style ESA

In some areas, you can no longer claim irESA and have to claim Universal Credit instead. In these areas you can still claim cbESA but it may be called new style ESA instead.⁴

You can find out more information about Universal Credit at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.
How often will I get paid ESA?
Your ESA will be paid into your bank, building society or post office account every two weeks.

How much will I get?

The basic rate of ESA
The first 13 weeks of your claim is called the assessment phase. During the assessment phase, you get the basic rate of ESA. From April 2017, the basic rate of ESA is:\(^5\)
- £73.10 a week for single people over the age of 25,
- £57.90 a week for single people under the age of 25, or
- £114.85 a week for adult couples.

Extra amounts
During the first 13 weeks, you should have a medical assessment. This is so that the DWP can decide if you are well enough to work or not.

If the DWP decides you are not well enough to work you will go into the main phase of ESA. You will be put into one of the following groups.

- The work-related activity group (WRAG)
- The support group

If you are put in one of these groups the basic rate of ESA is the same even if you are under 25.\(^6\) You don’t get less if you are under 25.

You might also get an extra amount on top of the basic rate. This depends on which of the two ESA groups you are in and the date you claimed:\(^7,\(^8\)

- **WRAG** if you claimed before 3 April 2017 – you will get an extra amount of £29.05 per week.
- **WRAG** if you claimed after 3 April 2017 - you will only get the basic rate and no extra amount.
- **Support group** - you will get an extra amount of £37.65 a week.

You can find more information about these groups in section 4 ‘What are the groups of ESA?’ below.

Sometimes you can get extra money added to your benefit. These extra amounts are called ‘premiums’.

Enhanced disability premium
You will get the enhanced disability premium if you are in the support group or if you get:\(^9\)
- Disability Living Allowance (high rate care component),
- Personal Independence Payment (enhanced daily living component), or
- Armed Forces Independence Payment.
This is an extra £16.40 per week.¹⁰

Severe disability premium
You will get the severe disability premium if you are single and get:

- Disability Living Allowance (middle or high rate care component), or
- Personal Independence Payment (standard or enhanced daily living component).

There must also be:¹¹

- no other adults living with you, and
- nobody that gets Carers Allowance for caring for you.

There are different rules if you live with a partner.

The severe disability premium is an extra £64.30 per week.¹²

2. How can I claim?

You can telephone Jobcentre Plus on 0800 055 6688 to start your claim. An adviser will ask you for the following information, and some other more detailed questions.¹³

- Name, address, date of birth and telephone numbers
- National insurance number
- Mortgage or landlord details
- Council tax details
- Brief explanation of your illness or disability
- Name, address and telephone number of your GP
- Details of other benefits you claim
- Details of any work you have done
- Bank account details

You will need a ‘fit note’ from your GP to start your claim.

If you do not want to claim by phone, you can ask the DWP to send you a claim form. This is called an ‘ESA1’ form. Or you can get a copy online and take it to your nearest Jobcentre Plus office.¹⁴ You can download the form from: www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-and-support-allowance-claim-form.

If you need help then a carer, friend or relative could call the DWP or fill in the form for you. You will need to be with them when they make the calls so you can give them permission to speak for you.
In some areas, you have to claim a new benefit called Universal Credit instead of income-related ESA.

You can find out more information about Universal Credit at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

3. What is the Work Capability Assessment?

The DWP uses a test called the ‘Work Capability Assessment’ (WCA) to decide if you can get ESA.

The WCA has 2 parts.

- Filling in a health questionnaire called an ESA50.
- Going to a face to face assessment.

The WCA takes at least 13 weeks. This is called the ‘assessment phase’.

Fit notes

During this time:

- you have to send the DWP ‘fit notes’ from your GP saying that you are not well enough to work,
- if your fit note runs out before the DWP makes a decision about your claim, you will have to get a new one,15 and
- if your fit note runs out and you do not get a new one, your benefit will stop.

The health questionnaire – form ESA50

After your claim begins, you will get an ESA50 form in the post. This is a questionnaire which asks how your illness makes it harder for you to work.

There is a letter with the form which tells you when you have to send it back to the DWP. Tell the DWP:

- if you can’t complete the form by that date, and
- why you need more time.

A benefits adviser could help with your application. You will find more information in section 9 ‘Do I need to speak to a benefits adviser?’

Supporting evidence

You can get supporting medical evidence from a health professional such as a doctor.

You don’t have to do this but it can help show the DWP that you are not fit to work.
Ask someone who knows you well in the NHS or social services to write a letter to the DWP to support your claim. This could be your:

- GP,
- community psychiatric nurse (CPN),
- psychiatrist,
- social worker, or
- support worker.

The DWP must look at any supporting evidence you give them. They should use this to help them make a decision.16

The evidence can explain:

- how your condition makes it harder for you to work,
- what would happen to your health if you had to start looking for work, and
- how you meet the criteria for ESA.

A letter that just says what your diagnosis is or what your symptoms are isn’t helpful.

Send copies of your evidence and keep the originals somewhere safe.

You can attach the evidence to the ESA50 or send it separately if you need to. Remember to write the following information on any paperwork you send.

- Name
- Address
- National Insurance number
- Claim number, if you know it

You can find a sample supporting evidence letter at the end of our ‘Work Capability Assessment’ factsheet. You can download the factsheet from www.rethink.org, or call 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

**Medical assessment**

You usually have to go for a medical assessment.

At the assessment you will see a health professional such as:

- a nurse,
- a physiotherapist,
- occupational therapist, or
- a doctor (this is less likely).
If you want to speak to an expert in mental health, make this clear when you fill in the ESA50. You do not have the right to this, but the DWP will take it into account.

The health professional will ask you questions about your health and write a report based on what you say.

Once the DWP have the information they need, they will decide whether you can get ESA.

Taking someone with you

You can take someone with you to the assessment. They can support you and make notes. They might give the person who assesses you useful information about your condition.

You can take:

- a friend,
- a relative,
- a carer,
- a support worker, or
- anyone who knows you well.

No medical assessment

The DWP might decide that you meet the criteria for ESA based on just the ESA50 and your medical evidence. If they do you will not need to go for a medical assessment. But most people do have to go for one.

You can find more information about ‘Work Capability Assessments’ at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

4. What are the groups of ESA?

There are 3 decisions the DWP can make about your ESA claim. They could decide:

- to give you ESA and put you into the work-related activity group (WRAG),
- to give you ESA and put you into the support group, or
- you are fit for work and should not get ESA.

Work-related activity group (WRAG)

- You will have to go at least 1 work-focused interview.\(^{17}\)
- You may have to take part in the Work Programme. See section 5 ‘What is the Work Programme?’ for more information about this.\(^ {18}\)
- You will get less money than if you are in the support group.\(^ {19,20}\)
- You can only get contribution-based ESA for one year.\(^ {21}\)
Support Group

- You do not have to go to interviews or take part in the Work Programme.  
- If you get contribution-based ESA, you can get it as long as you meet the criteria for the support group.  
- You will get an additional amount of money on top of the basic ESA rate from the 14th week of your claim. If it takes the DWP longer than this to decide which group to put you in, they will backdate the money.

5. Will I be re-assessed?

The DWP will reassess you at regular intervals. This is because they need to make sure that you are still too unwell to work. The DWP will let you know how long you will get ESA for. The length of time between re-assessments depends on your condition. You will be usually be re-assessed every 1, 2 or 3 years.

From 29 September 2017, if you are in the support group, you will no longer need to be re-assessed if you:

- have a severe, lifelong disability, illness or health condition, and
- are unlikely to ever be able to move into work.

You will be told if you will not be reassessed. The DWP have not said how this will affect people with severe mental illness.

6. What is the Work Programme?

The Work Programme helps people get into work.

If you are in the work related activity group (WRAG) you may have to take part. If you are in the support group you don’t have to take part. But you can if you want to.

Different organisations run the Work Programme in different areas. These organisations are called ‘providers’.

If you are going to the Work Programme, you will have meetings with the provider. You will talk about what will help you get into work.

You can ask for support with:

- basic skills for maths or writing,
- confidence building,
- how to produce a CV, and
- managing a mental illness in the workplace.
The provider will know about work and training opportunities in your area.

**What will happen if I don’t go to an interview?**

If the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) asks you to go to a work-focused interview or the Work Programme, you have to go. They may reduce your ESA if you don’t.²⁹

You may have a good reason for not being able to go to a meeting. Tell the DWP as soon as you know you will not be able to go to a meeting.

If you do not tell the DWP about a missed appointment, they will contact you.

You have 5 working days to tell the DWP by post why you could not go before they reduce your ESA. But it can be less than 5 days if:

- the DWP can contact you by phone or face to face, or
- you have agreed to be contacted by text or email.

**7. What is permitted work?**

You can do some work while you claim ESA and get the same amount of ESA. This is called permitted work.

Any work you do will be permitted work if you earn less than £20 a week.³¹ You can also do permitted work if you:³²

- earn less that £125.50 a week, and
- work less than 16 hours a week.

There used to be a 52-week rule for people in the work-related activity group (WRAG).

This rule used to say that you could only do permitted work in the WRAG for no more than 52 weeks.

This rule no longer exists from 17th April 2017. So, from that date all ESA claimants can do permitted work for as long as they want.³³

**Supported permitted work**

Supported permitted work is work that is:

- part of your treatment, or
- is supervised by someone who arranges work for disabled people.

This might be someone from the local authority or a voluntary organisation.
If you do supported permitted work and don’t earn more than £125.50 a week, your ESA will not be affected.\textsuperscript{34}

You need to tell the DWP if you do any supported permitted work. If they think your ability to work has changed they might ask you to do another work capability assessment.

\textbf{8. Can I appeal if I think a decision is wrong?}

You can ask the DWP to look at your claim again if they say:

- that you should not get ESA, or
- that you should be in the WRAG and you think you should be in the support group.

This is called a ‘mandatory reconsideration’.

You have one month from the date of the decision to ask for a mandatory reconsideration. You have to ask for a mandatory reconsideration before you can appeal.\textsuperscript{35}

If you appeal, an independent tribunal will decide if the DWP made the right decision.\textsuperscript{36}

You can find more information about ‘\textit{Appealing benefit decisions}’ at \url{www.rethink.org}. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

\textbf{9. What if I have a relative who refuses to claim benefits?}

You may know someone who can’t or doesn’t want to claim benefits even though they could get them.

You may be able to become an ‘appointee’ and claim on their behalf. If you want to do this you should speak to your local Jobcentre.\textsuperscript{37}

You can find more information about ‘\textit{Options for Dealing with Someone Else’s Financial Affairs}’ at \url{www.rethink.org}. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

\textbf{10. Do I need to speak to a benefits adviser?}

The benefits system is complicated. You should speak to a benefit adviser if you don’t know which benefits you could get. They may be able to help you with claims or appeals.
Organisations that offer benefits advice are different around the country. Many parts of the country have a Citizens Advice service, but not all do. You can search for local services at advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk.

**Rethink Mental Illness Factsheets:**
You can find more information about:
- Welfare benefits and mental illness
- Appealing benefits decisions
- Work Capability Assessment

at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

You can also get more information on ESA on the Gov.uk website - www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance

**c-App ESA Assessment Support**
This is an online tool you can use to help you prepare for your work capability assessment. You can find it online using this link:

www.esa-assessment.support

**Jobcentre Plus**
This is the organisation that you contact to claim ESA.

**Telephone:** 0800 055 6688 (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm)

**Citizens Advice**
Citizens Advice offer free, confidential, impartial and independent advice. They can advise on debt, benefits, housing and other issues. You can get face-to-face or telephone advice. Find your local service to see the full range of services.

**Telephone:** 03444 111 444 (national advice)
**Website:** www.citizensadvice.org.uk

**Turn2us**
A charitable service which helps people access money that is available to them – through welfare benefits, grants and other help.

**Telephone:** 0808 802 2000 (9am to 8pm Monday to Friday)
Many local authorities have benefits advisers. You can find contact details for your local authority on the Gov.UK website.

Website: www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council

3 As note 1.
7 As note 2 (SI 2008/794) Schedule 4 paras 12 and 13,
9 As note 2 (SI 2008/794), Schedule 4 para 7.
10 As note 2 (SI 2008/794) Schedule 4 part 3.
12 As note 2 (SI 2008/794) Schedule 4 part 3.
14 As note 11.
15 As note 2 (SI 2008/794), Reg 4.
20 As note 2 (SI 2008/794), Schedule 4 para 7.
25 Department for Work and Pensions. A guide to Employment and


28 Citizens’ Advice. About the ESA support group and work-related activity group.

29 As note 2 (SI 2008/794), Reg 63.


34 As note 2 (SI 2008/794), Reg 45(3).


