

FACTSHEET:

FACE -TO-FACE ASSESSMENT

Why have I been asked to attend an assessment?

Most claimants of DWP disability benefits need to have a telephone, video or face-to-face assessment, so that the DWP understand how your conditions affect you when undertaking the 12-point scoring activities that make up the PIP criteria.

It is possible for the DWP to undertake a paper-based assessment, which means that your case is assessed purely on the form and documents that you provided to them. This is quite unusual, only happening in 10-20% of cases nationally. For PIPP Support Group clients we find that about 60% of our cases are awarded on paper-based assessments.

The DWP employ third party providers to undertake medical assessments on their behalf. These vary depending on where you live and are as follows:

- **CAPITA**
- **INGEUS**
- **MAXIMUS**
- **SERCO**

A Face-To-Face assessment does not suit me, or I cannot attend on the time or date I've been given.

We have been assured by the assessment providers that they will always try to adjust an assessment to suit a claimant – but remember, you can only change any or all aspects of the assessment once.

If you have been given a face-to-face assessment but cannot get there, need someone with you or if you simply would be better suited to a telephone or video assessment – then you can call the number on your appointment letter and ask to change this. If you need to change the time or the date, then you must do this at the same time. They will generally not allow you to change anything for a second time.

WHO COMPLETES THE ASSESSMENT?

You will speak with a Health Care Professional (HCP) employed by the assessment provider. This will either be:

- A registered nurse (both general and mental health specialists)
- A physiotherapist
- An occupational therapist
- A paramedic

CAN I HAVE A FRIEND, FAMILY MEMBER OR ADVOCATE JOIN THE ASSESSMENT AS A THIRD PARTY?

We often hear that many of you feel better if you have a companion at the assessment, be this a friend, family member, neighbour, a colleague, or a professional support worker or advocate. If you have mental health conditions then this could be to support with your answers, or if you have physical health problems simply for moral support, to read through the form, or take notes.

We have a team of Advocates ready to join your assessment. If we do this, we arrange two preparatory calls in advance of the assessment. This is so that we know a little about you and you know what to expect. We then take comprehensive notes of all that is said during the assessment.

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TRAVELLING TO THE ASSESSMENT

If you have conditions that will mean that they are assessing your ability to go out alone, then it's a good idea to take someone with you to the meeting. If you have no other choice but to attend on your own, ensure you tell the HCP that you had no option and how it makes you feel being there unaccompanied.

If you don't usually drive, then do not drive yourself to the centre or take public transport if you are claiming that you have difficulties planning and following a journey, mobilising, or with your grip. Get a lift or ask the DWP (PIP Enquiry Line) in advance to authorise a taxi for you. Make sure that you are dropped off right outside the door so that they do not see you mobilising any further than necessary.

When you arrive:

You will need two forms of ID. A bank card and your appointment letter are usually fine. Please let your companion handle these if possible. The receptionist should ask if you want to claim expenses. Allow your companion to deal with this while you go and sit down. If you are alone, ensure that you are not pushing yourself to stand or fill in forms which cause you pain. You can request to take the form home and fill it in if you wish.

If you have physical difficulties then choose a chair with arms, if that is an option, and use these or your companions' support to sit and stand from the chair if this is what you would usually do. You do not have to sit still, if you are uncomfortable then move around. There is usually at least a 20-minute wait to allow the HCP time to read through your form and evidence. If you need a drink during the assessment, then it is recommended to take a water bottle with a sports cap. Do not be tempted to play with your phone, read a book or magazine, use the water coolers, or pick up magazines in reception.

Recording the assessment:

You can record your assessment; however, you should ask for permission from all parties in advance. You will need to call the assessment providers to ask for this in advance. If you covertly record, without permission – this may lead to issues with the admissibility of the recording as evidence in the future due to various factors including data protection regulations. You may only record audio during an assessment, video recording is never permitted.

It is the PIPP Support Groups advice that you don't generally need to record the assessment unless you want it for your own records. Recordings have limited use after the event as the DWP and HMCTS will not generally be interested in listening to these as part of any mandatory reconsideration or appeal process.

During the assessment:

The HCP will call you into the assessment room. They will note if you hear and respond to your name being called along with how you rose from the chair.

They will generally walk behind you on the way to the room, so that they can assess the speed that you walk, your gait and how you use any aids. They may also observe how you manage the usually heavy door to the examination room (they often won't hold the door for you deliberately). Ask your companion to open/hold the door for you if you think you will find it heavy. The assessment rooms are usually several metres from the waiting room, so ensure that you are stopping when you need to if you are feeling pain or fatigue. Don't push yourself to get there in one go.

Make sure you are dressed as you would be on a usual day. It is not necessary to get dressed smartly. If you do not usually get dressed, then it's fine to stay in your nightwear as long as this is decent, and you are covered appropriately.

The HCP will usually tell you their name, but they do not have to tell you how they are qualified or their usual profession (such as nurse or paramedic). They will also take the names of your companions and their relationship to you.

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During the assessment continued:

Make sure your companion has a copy of your application form to hand and a list of your conditions and medications (or a prescription list). It's also a good idea to make a list of all the aids and appliances you need – if these are not already listed in your form.

The HCP should have read over your form and evidence before the assessment. They do not have a great deal of time to do this so they may have only scanned through it quickly. You will be asked lots of questions, mostly referring to the form you have already filled in. The HCP will be typing the whole way through the assessment to produce the assessment report. It might feel like you are repeating a lot of the information you have already given to them, but they need to confirm this with you for the report.

An example of some of the questions that you might be asked are as follows:

- Do you work and what is your job?
- Who do you live with?
- What qualifications did you get at school, college or university?
- Can you stand for long enough to prepare a meal?
- Can you reach your feet when dressing?
- Do you remember to take your medications?
- How many minutes can you walk for?
- What speed do you walk? Slow, the same speed as everyone else, or fast?
- How do you know what speed you walk at? Do you lag behind others?
- What makes you stop when you are walking? Pain, breathlessness, poor balance?
- Where is your car parked? Can you walk from the house to the car?
- Where do you get dropped off / park at your GP surgery?
- Where do you stop on the way from the car to reception and why? How far is that?
- Do you have falls or stumbles? If so, how often and what causes them?
- How do you walk? Do you have a limp or poor gait?
- Can you visit the GP on your own?
- How do you get your shopping?
- How do you manage your cleaning?
- Could you manage to get onto a bus or a train?
- Can you add up or subtract (then give you a simple calculation to manage).

They will also ask about variability. This is how often you are affected by your conditions each week or month. Be very specific about this as this can make all of the difference between obtaining an award or not.

Remember the DWP are only interested in how you would manage on most days – not on your very worst day or best days. Make sure you are explaining how your affect you on 'most days'. If you base your answers entirely on your worst days and these are not 'most days' then the HCP will not have a clear impression of how you manage most of the time.

The HCP may also ask you to try to perform some movements for them. These are optional and it is ok to say no if you cannot manage them. Don't do anything that causes you pain or that you are concerned may cause you discomfort or to fall. Make sure that you tell them if you are struggling with any of the movements that they ask you to attempt. Also remember that the HCP will be watching your movements during the assessment so things such as scratching your head, using a pen or reaching down to pick up something from the floor may also be used within the report.

BEWARE of general chatty questions before or during the assessment and be very careful of how you answer these as they can lead to you losing points without even realising it.

If you feel too rushed, then ask them to slow down as you should not guess at answers. This can be detrimental. Also ensure you understand what the HCP is asking or explain that you do not understand. It is fine to ask the HCP to repeat or rephrase the question. An average assessment lasts 45 – 90 minutes, often longer. We generally do not expect them to last less than 30 minutes.



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During the assessment continued:

Finally, tell the truth and open up as much as you can. Remember to always be honest and not to exaggerate. There are many good HCPs out there, but should things not go to plan then you are entitled to complain afterwards and/or challenge any resulting decision, and our team can assist you with the details to do so if needed.

After the Assessment:

Although you may be relieved that the assessment is over, make sure you exit the building at your usual speed, stopping when you need to. The HCP may still be monitoring you on the way out. Do not do anything outside of the building that is out of character. Ensure that you are picked up right outside the building. If you smoke, it's a good idea to wait until you are out of sight of the building.

After the assessment ends, the HCP will finalise their report and send this to the DWP for them to make a decision on your claim. Unfortunately, there can be a wait of several weeks for them to do this.

You might receive a text from the DWP to let you know that they have received your report from the HCP. Once you receive that text or, if you do not get a text then around a week after your assessment, we suggest that you call the PIP enquiry line to request a copy of the PA4 assessment report. When you receive this, you will be able to read the HCP's justifications for the points that they recommend that the DWP award you. Although the recommendations within the report are not the final decision – usually this will give you a good idea as to what you might be awarded when the decision is made.

If the award is not what you had hoped for, you can begin to prepare for a Mandatory Reconsideration, well before the decision arrives with you.

Remember that when submitting a Mandatory Reconsideration, we always suggest doing this in writing as a response to the HCP's report. Make sure you send in medical evidence to support your case. You generally are allowed 13 months to do this as a disabled person, not the 1-month limit that the DWP give you. However, if you inform the DWP that you want a Mandatory Reconsideration over the phone, they will usually put you on a deadline for them to make a decision. Therefore, we advise not to call them to start the Mandatory Reconsideration until you have your arguments and evidence ready to send.

Please do not forget, we are always here to help. We offer a Form Completion service by telephone and Teams video link. We can attend your assessment with you over the phone or by video link.

We also offer assistance from our Legally Qualified Team with Mandatory Reconsideration drafting and Appeal Representation, including attending the hearing remotely with you.

Usually, when we are involved from the early stages, appeals are not necessary.

Get in Touch:

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