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## Tips for completing benefits application forms

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### Introduction

This factsheet has been written for brain injury survivors who are applying for welfare benefits. It offers some helpful tips on completing the application forms and things to consider for the next steps of your application.

Further general information on the process of applying to these benefits can be found in Headway's benefits factsheets available at [www.headway.org.uk/information-library](http://www.headway.org.uk/information-library).

### Tips for completing forms

- Be mindful of any dates by which you must return the form. This should be included in the letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that accompanied your application form. It might help to set an alarm a few days ahead of the date, or to write it down on a calendar.
- Contact the DWP if you feel you may need more time with completing the form.
- Consider asking for help with completing the form from someone who knows you well. This could be particularly useful if you have problems with your memory or insight, as these issues may cause you to forget to include important details relevant to your application.
- If you are requesting evidence from healthcare professionals such as medical reports or letters, ask whether these can be written so that they specifically address the difficulties you describe in your application form. For instance, you could ask your GP to write a letter about how your brain injury has affected the type of thinking skills that you would rely on for work, or your physiotherapist could write about how you have one sided weakness that makes it difficult for you to get washed/dressed by yourself. Mention any recommended aids or appliances made by an occupational therapist as well.
- If you are submitting medical evidence from many years ago, for instance if your brain injury was years ago, consider that evidence older than 2 years might be dismissed, so ask your GP/consultant to confirm that the evidence is still relevant and applicable.
- Many people feel that the application forms are quite lengthy. Take breaks if you need to and tackle one section at a time rather than trying to complete the whole form in one go. If you are worried about writing the wrong thing down on



your form, draft your answers on a separate piece of paper first.

- Avoid simply stating whether you 'can' or 'can't' do something. Instead, discuss how safely and independently you can do a task, whether you complete it, how long it typically takes you and how you feel during/ afterwards. For instance, you may feel able to sit in front of a computer screen to work for a few hours, but does this leave you with headaches and fatigue afterwards? Or you may be able to cook a meal, but do you forget to switch the cooker off when you're done?
- As well as discussing the effects of your brain injury, consider and explain the effects of any medication you are on, or any rehabilitation you are having.
- Keep a diary of the ways in which your brain injury impacts you for a few days before you complete your form. You can then refer to this information while completing the forms as a general guide to some of the issues you commonly face.
- Once you have completed the form, keep a dated copy for yourself. This will be useful for you to refer to during the assessment that follows, for any future appeals you may need to undertake or generally for your own records.
- Issues like fatigue or memory problems may have an impact on several different aspects of your life, so may need to be repeated in different sections of your application.

The most important thing to remember while completing your application form is to be honest about the impact of your brain injury. Offer as much detail as you can, including any effects that fluctuate. You will probably have a chance to explain things in more detail during an assessment that follows, but claims can sometimes be processed based on the information in an application form alone so it is good to add as much detail as you possibly can at this stage.

If you need further assistance with completing your form, consider contacting your nearest Headway group or branch or your local Citizens Advice for help. You may also be able to get help from a benefits advisor. For help with finding a benefits advisor, use the Turn2Us Advisor tool at [advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk](https://advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk).

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