

Attendance Allowance

If you are of pensionable age and have a sight problem you will probably have extra expenses, such as taxis or help at home. Attendance Allowance (AA) can help you with these additional costs.

What is Attendance Allowance?

Attendance Allowance is a benefit for people aged 65 or over who need help with personal care because of a disability or health problem and is paid by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Many partially sighted people who should be getting AA are currently missing out.

Do I qualify?

You may qualify for AA if you need help to do things, like choosing clothes, reading post, walking around safely and taking part in social activities. AA is not means tested. It can be paid on top of other benefits and may even increase the amount of other benefits you get. If you already get Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) you cannot get AA as well.

Do I have to be registered partially sighted to receive AA?

No, you do not have to be registered as partially sighted (sight impaired) or blind (severely sight impaired) to claim AA. It is how any disability or impairment affects your daily living that counts. Registration can provide evidence of how serious your sight loss is, but you can provide alternative evidence about your sight loss, such as a letter from your consultant or GP.

If your sight loss is making life difficult, being registered sight impaired can enable you to support. For further information ask for our Registering as Blind or Partially Sighted leaflet.

How much could you receive?

Currently weekly rates (as at 2019/20 tax year) are £58.70 for the lower rate and £87.65 for the higher rate. The DWP will consider the care you need during the day and night and how often it is needed.

How do you claim?

Use the Attendance Allowance Form (AA1) to apply by post. You can also fill the form in online, save it and print it. The form comes with notes telling you how to fill it in.

Send the completed form to:

Attendance Allowance Unit
Mail Handling Site A
Wolverhampton
WV98 2AD

Attendance Allowance helpline

Telephone: 0800 731 0122

Call the Attendance Allowance helpline to ask for:

- A copy of the form
- Alternative formats, such as braille, large print or audio CD.

Tips for completing the form

Most claims are decided solely by the information you put on the form, so it is important that you fully explain your problems caused by sight loss and any other conditions.

The form asks about your disabilities and any medication you take. If you are registered as blind or partially sighted you should write that here and also the date you were registered.

If you have a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI), or BD8 form, send a photocopy with the application form. If you were registered some time ago and your sight has deteriorated since then, you should say so. The DWP, who administer AA, may want to write to your GP or hospital doctor to get more information about your condition.

The most important parts of the form are the sections where you explain how your sight loss and other conditions affect you.

The form asks about the help you need during the day and at night; when your difficulties began and anything else you wish to tell the DWP.

If you run out of space you can include another sheet of paper.

The help you need

Do not underestimate your needs. Most people find that a positive attitude makes it easier to live with sight loss. However, just on this occasion, think of all the things that you can't do, or have trouble doing, because of your disability, including social and leisure activities such as gardening or visiting friends.

Think about a typical day or week and consider when you may have difficulty or need help. It can be very helpful for you, or someone close to you, to make a list of all the things that you need help with over a few days.

The form specifically asks you to fill this in for how things are on your **worst day**. Remember, these are things that you find difficult alone, not with the help of someone else. For example, if you find you have no problems preparing meals

because someone else does it for you, imagine how difficult it would be to do if that person wasn't there. When dressing you might need someone to check your clothes are clean or help with fastenings such as zips or shoelaces. You may avoid wearing certain clothing that you find difficult to manage. Maybe you have developed ways of coping with certain activities. However, if an activity takes you much longer than it would take a sighted person, or if it is difficult for you to do safely, that can be taken into account.

It's the amount of help that you need that matters, not the amount of help that you get. If you are struggling to do things unaided despite difficulties or pain, explain this on the form. If you have to lead a restricted lifestyle because you don't get all the help you need, this should be taken into account too.

A diary of the daily assistance that you need or would like will help to support your Attendance Allowance claim. It may also help you when you are completing the claim form and considering your needs.

Focus on frequency

To qualify for AA you have to show that you need help frequently throughout the day. For example, if you need help looking after your appearance, this could add up to six or seven times a day if you include help to check your clothes are clean after a meal, help to find a coat or matching shoes to go out, and so on.

If you use or have tried special equipment, explain its limitations

Special equipment can be useful but often it doesn't fully solve the problem - you may still need help from someone else. For example, you may be able to read most things using a magnifying glass, but still need help from another person to

read long texts, small print, handwriting and writing that you can't get up close to.

Mention any special circumstances that could increase your need for help or supervision

- Do you have any other health problems and how do these affect you?
- Has your sight or your health got worse recently?
- Was your sight loss sudden or have you found it hard to adapt?
- Have you had a bereavement or moved to a new home?

Carer's Allowance

The person who cares for you could claim £66.15 a week (as at 2019/20 tax year) if they care for you at least 35 hours a week and you are in receipt of Attendance Allowance

They do not have to be related to, or live with you in order to claim. For further information call 0800 731 0297 or go to www.gov.uk/carers-allowance

What if my claim for AA is turned down?

You can challenge a decision about your Attendance Allowance. In most cases the time limit for doing this is just **one month** from the date on the decision letter.

Challenging AA decisions

If you disagree with a decision about your Attendance Allowance (AA) you can either:

- ask the DWP to look at its decision again
- **or** appeal to an independent appeal tribunal.

Ask the Disability and Carer's Service (DCS), if possible in writing, to look at the decision again. Their contact details will be on the decision letter.

A different decision-maker will look at the decision again. If they alter the decision this is a **revision**. If the DCS does not change its decision, or if they change the decision but you still don't agree with it, you can ask for an **appeal**.

If benefit is awarded, or increased, as a result of a revision, the change will take effect from the date of the original decision.

You can ask the DCS for a written statement of the reasons for its decision within one month of the date on the decision letter. This can be useful when considering an appeal. If you ask for this statement, the normal one-month time limit for challenging the decision will be extended by 14 days. This applies when making a review or an appeal application.

Appeals

If you do not agree with a decision about your claim you can appeal to an independent tribunal either:

- Straightaway following the initial decision
- Or after the DCS has looked at the decision again (see above).

You have **one month** from the date of the decision to request an appeal.

To appeal you should complete the appeal form **GL24**, 'If you think our decision is wrong', available from the DCS or downloadable from the DirectGov website. You can also enclose any supporting evidence. Send the form to the office that made the decision.

When you ask for an appeal, a decision-maker will have another look at the decision, if they have not already done so. They have the power to change it without the need for an appeal tribunal. If you have reasonable cause for an appeal, it is very common that it will be changed at this stage.

If they change the decision, and it is to your advantage, the appeal will stop. If the new decision does not give you everything you want you will have to put in a fresh appeal within one month of the decision. The hearing is **not** like a formal court hearing, and a friend or representative can accompany you to help you.

Applying for a review or appeal

When writing a letter to ask the decision-maker to reconsider a decision, or completing an appeal form, you should:

- Clearly identify the decision that you are disputing
- Explain why you do not agree with the initial decision

Reconsideration / appeal request

You could write something along the lines of the following in a reconsideration or appeal request:

[DCS Address]

Your name:

Address:

Your NI number:

Dear Sir / Madam

Attendance Allowance

Please reconsider your decision dated (date) regarding my claim for Attendance Allowance. I was registered blind /

partially sighted on (date) and I require attention frequently throughout the day with seeing. I need help with:

- Dressing and checking my appearance throughout the day
- Washing / shaving / applying make-up / styling hair
- Identifying food, cutting up food, removing bones/gristle
- Reading mail, correspondence, newspapers, magazines, books, etc.
- Identifying and taking medication
- Getting about safely indoors and outdoors
- Social, recreational and cultural activities.

[Give examples of your own care needs and all of the times that you reasonably require help.]

I have enclosed the following information in respect of my claim, which I trust you will consider in the review: [for instance, a letter from a consultant or report from a rehabilitation officer].

Yours faithfully,

Supporting evidence

Supporting evidence for a review or appeal increases your chances of success, such as:

- Information about your sight condition
- A diary of the occasions when you need help from another person
- Medical evidence from a consultant or GP such as a letter explaining how your sight problems affect your daily life
- A copy of your registration certificate
- A report from a social worker or rehabilitation officer

What happens if you miss the time limit?

If you miss the time limit for a revision request, or an appeal, it may still be possible to get the decision changed, but the rules are complicated. Seek advice from a reliable source straight away as any further delay could be harmful to your case.

What happens if your circumstances change?

If there has been a change in circumstances, for example if you need more help because your eyesight has deteriorated, an AA award can be altered at any time. If a decision is changed because of a change of circumstances it is called a **supersession**. If your condition deteriorates (or improves) while you are receiving AA you should inform the DCS as soon as possible. You can ask for your claim to be reconsidered. The DCS will ask you to complete another form to provide more information about the help that you need.

You should ask for a reconsideration even if you have already asked for an appeal to get a higher rate of benefit. This is because the appeal tribunal will only be able to consider whether the decision under appeal was correct at the time when it was made. They cannot take into account changes of circumstances that happened after the decision was made. If

you go into a care home and the local authority are paying your care fees, then your AA will stop. You must inform the DWP that this has happened, or you could be subject to a fine.

Other grounds for a supersession

Your existing AA award can be looked at again at any time for reasons other than a change in your circumstances. These include:

- The original decision was made in ignorance of a material fact
- The original decision was based on a mistake about a material fact

WARNING

If you are already getting lower rate AA, there is a risk that your existing benefit could be lost if your claim is reconsidered by the DCS or by an appeal tribunal. This does not happen often but you should seek informed advice if in any doubt.

More Information

For more information and help on claiming Attendance Allowance

- Macular Society Advice and Information on **0300 3030 111**
- DWP Benefits Enquiry Line on **0800 055 6688**
- Age UK Helpline on **0800 00 99 66**