

Attendance Allowance - A Beginners Guide

Many of you will know people who are receiving Attendance Allowance and quite a few of you may have been recommended to apply for it but been a bit worried about it. It can be a very useful benefit being tax free, not means tested, (they don't want to know how much money you have,) and can pay you anything from £55.10 to £82.30 per week. Receiving Attendance Allowance may also help you qualify for some forms of community support and will help if you get Pension Credit.

The bad news is that the application form is longer than some books, it requires you to fit your life into their boxes and to focus on all the stuff you have difficulty doing. It also can take months to get the claim sorted out and the DWP can be absolute twits about looking at your claim.

To add insult to injury, the DWP assume that, as soon as you reach 65 you become partially disabled and the lower levels of payment available with Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment are not available. So you can't claim it if you have difficulty hanging out the washing, if you get a bit puffed climbing the stairs nor if you regularly find yourself in the kitchen and can't remember why you came in.

So who can claim it?

This benefit is for people aged 65 and older who have a long term disabling condition. Parkinsons certainly qualifies as that.

You have to require assistance or supervision with personal care. That means: getting in and out of bed, getting washed and dressed, medicating yourself, eating, walking, seeing, communicating & keeping safe. Being able to do all this in a reasonable time, repeatedly and safely. To get the higher rate you will also need assistance or attention during the night time.

If you need reminding by another person to take your medication, if you need help getting dressed after using the toilet, if you need someone to watch over you because you may fall, may injure yourself or place others at risk. All these might be indications that you could be eligible for Attendance Allowance.

If you need assistance more than once in the night or just once, but the other person is going to be up for more than 20 minutes, then you may be eligible.

I would encourage you to seek assistance with applying for this benefit. I do not have time to help people fill in their form but I am happy to come and have a chat with you to see if it might be worthwhile. I may suggest that you get some preparation done. For instance getting a helpful letter from the specialist nurse or your consultant. This can be very powerful but they are all busy folk so allow plenty of time. Consider keeping a diary for a couple of weeks noting, for instance: how many times you fall, how long things take to do, how many times a night you need help, how many times

you forget your medication, are there things you find harder to do at particular times of day.

It is very easy to feel judged by having to answer these questions. But, to be fair to the DWP, they are not judging you, just matching you against their criteria. If you fit, you get the money, if you don't, they won't pay you. At worst they are bean counters, so give them beans. Give them numbers, dates, frequencies. It makes the process of decision making more straightforward.

So I can help with the preparation, if you need help completing the form then Age UK Wiltshire can help. 01380 727767. The DWP also has a Home Visiting Service. I can refer you to that if it would help. If you are ex-UK Armed Forces, including National Service, the Royal British Legion can also help with benefits advice as long as you have served for a minimum of 7 days. Their contact number is 0808 802 8080. They also have a pop-in advice centre at 52-54 Regent Street, Swindon (the library end of Regent Street).

So don't sit at home worrying about this. Take control, call me for a chat or invite me around for one. Let's see if you can claim just a bit more money, it can't harm and may help.

Ken Luxon

Parkinson's UK Local Advisor