

Cystic Fibrosis our focus

**Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
Telephone Assessments**

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) [announced](#) that from 17 March 2020, face-to-face assessments for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will be stopped for at least three months. This temporary change has been taken by them to protect vulnerable people from an unnecessary risk of exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19).

PIP is a financial benefit that is paid to help with some of the extra costs caused by long-term ill-health or a disability, for people aged 16 to 64.

The rate of this benefit is decided after an assessment process, which looks at how you are affected by your condition, not at the condition itself. The assessment process looks at your ability to carry out 10 daily living activities and two mobility activities. Please [contact our Helpline](#) if you'd like information about all the activities which will be covered in the PIP assessment.

Until recently many PIP decisions were made after you have had a face-to-face assessment with a private company approved by the DWP. The two private companies who carry out the assessments are [Capita](#) and [Independent Assessment Services \(IAS\)](#). Capita carries out PIP assessments on behalf of the DWP in Wales, the West Midlands and the East Midlands, and on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) in Northern Ireland. IAS covers the rest of the United Kingdom.

These companies will now be carrying out assessments for PIP, either by telephone or through a paper-based assessment. This guide is to help you prepare for a telephone assessment.

How to prepare for a telephone assessment

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust has been in contact with [Capita](#) and [IAS](#) and asked them to explain more about these telephone assessments.

How are you notified of a telephone assessment?

You will get an appointment letter about 1-2 weeks before the day. It will include the date and time as well as the telephone number that the assessor will call you on.

You may also get a text reminder if you have shared your mobile number.

You may also be offered a 'short notice appointment'. See page 4 for further information.

How much notice should you get?

The law says you should have at least seven days' notice.

What happens if you are unable to take the call?

If the date or time is not convenient because you have another appointment or need someone with you, you can call them on the telephone number given on the letter and ask to change it. **You will normally be allowed to change this once.**

Can you have someone with you at a PIP telephone assessment?

You can have someone to support you during the assessment, just as you can with a face-to-face assessment.

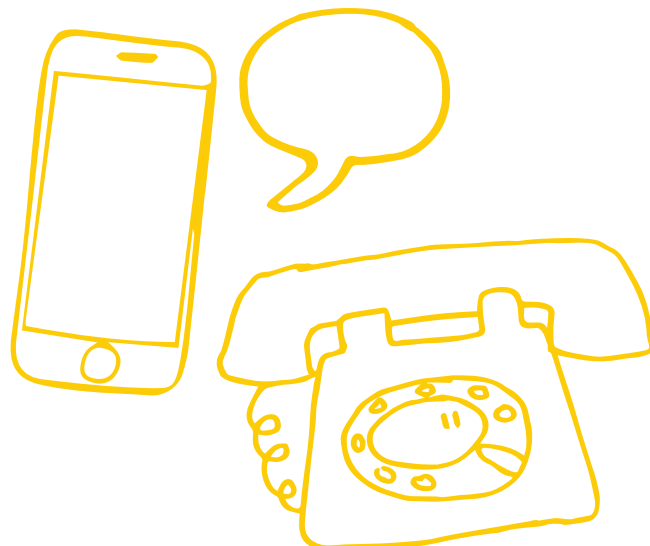
If you live alone, or the person you would like to support you cannot be with you in person, can you still have support during your call?

The assessor can add your support person (a third party) to the phone call if you have their telephone number ready when they call you.

If your assessment is with IAS, you should try to arrange this in advance by calling the number on the appointment letter.

Can a telephone assessment be recorded?

Telephone assessments can't be recorded, as the rules for recording assessments mean that there must be a machine used that can produce two audio copies at the same time so one can be given to the assessor **immediately after the assessment** and one can be kept by you. It's not possible for this to be done if the assessor is not meeting you in person.



What should you do if the call doesn't come through?

If your case is being handled by Capita, the assessor will try on the number they have three times over a 20-minute period. If you don't answer after the third time, the case will be rescheduled. If the same thing happens for the second appointment, the company will have to pass the case back to the DWP.

If your case is being handled by IAS and they cannot contact you at the appointed time, you should receive a call from an administrator to rearrange. If this doesn't happen, you should call the customer service number on your appointment letter.

You should try to contact whichever company is handling your assessment within 30 minutes of your original call time.

What should you do if you have further evidence to submit?

As you won't be able to show any further evidence to the assessor at the time of the assessment, it is important that you post any letters/evidence you wish to be considered to the DWP as soon as you can (the address where your PIP claim was sent to). The DWP makes the decision on your PIP claim.

If you are unable to get to a post office or post box, there may be services in your area that can help you. Find out more [here](#).

Remember, the best time to submit evidence is with your claim form, or as early as possible, as the evidence may allow the company handling your case to carry out a paper-based report, avoiding the need for a telephone assessment.

Is the telephone assessment the same as the face-to-face assessment? What will you be asked at your PIP telephone assessment?

We have been advised that a telephone assessment is very similar to a [face-to-face assessment](#). The main difference will be that there will be no 'informal observations' (this could be comments like 'looked alert' or 'was coughing'). There will also be no musculoskeletal examination (this is where an assessor can ask you to bend or stretch but only if it is not painful to do so).

You will be asked about your medical conditions and when you were diagnosed, what treatments you take for each of them, including if they are effective, a typical day and some details about social aspects of your life and work/study.

However, we've been advised that assessors may probe more by asking extra questions, as they cannot see you in person, and they may ask more questions to understand your mobility difficulties.

Further tips for people with cystic fibrosis

- **The assessment could take as long as an hour, so make sure you are comfortable**, have a pen/paper handy in case you want to write things down, and that your phone is fully charged. You may want to have a drink with you.
- **It is also a good idea to have a list of things you want to talk about.** Maybe even do some preparation by thinking about the PIP descriptors (daily living and mobility activities) you feel apply to you on most days.
- **Cystic fibrosis affects people in different ways, and this is your chance to explain how you are affected.** You may feel embarrassed but try to talk about all of the ways that CF affects you, even if they are embarrassing. If you don't talk about something, this may mean that the assessor does not have a full understanding of how CF affects you.
- The **impact your condition has on you** (most days in the last three months) and the **support you need to carry out the activities 'reliably'** is what you will need to explain to the assessor in the best way you can. We suggest you have thought about this before the call.
- **'Reliably'** in DWP terms means being able to do something **safely, to an acceptable standard, within a reasonable period of time** and being able to do something repeatedly, ie as **often as is required**.





Short notice appointments

Capital and IAS may offer you a 'short notice appointment' if they have had some cancellations. This could mean your assessment date is sooner, but you don't have to accept a short notice appointment.

Privacy

Assessors have been asked to carry out their assessments in a private, quiet space where possible. They have also been provided with a headset to ensure privacy and to eliminate any background noise as much as possible.

Other telephone calls

Please note that at times the assessors will decide that they have almost enough evidence to make a paper-based report for the DWP. They may call you or the health professionals you named on your PIP claim form to ask some more questions to help them complete their paper-based report. This is different to a full telephone assessment and should only be a quick call. However, if the call is 'out of the blue' and you feel you need to concentrate, have someone with you to support you, or be in a quiet place, then please ask for this. Take a note of the name of the assessor, the company, and the date and time if there are any problems with them agreeing to calling you back.

Following an assessment

After your assessment, it will be up to the DWP to decide on your claim. Timescales for writing up reports and sending them to the DWP have not changed. Both companies (Capita and IAS) are very keen to have feedback on this new process, so please [email our Helpline](#) if you'd like us to pass on any feedback to them. We will ask you which company carried out the assessment.

Further help and support

More information about PIP and cystic fibrosis can be found [here](#), or you can call our [Helpline](#) if you'd like help with your claim, a reconsideration or an appeal. Your CF team may also have a specialist CF social worker who is able to help.

Sangeeta Enright, Welfare and Rights Advisor, Cystic Fibrosis Trust. May 2020

Cystic Fibrosis Trust

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