

# Dos and don'ts of applying for benefits

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## Always follow these rules when applying for benefits:

- DO claim as soon as possible. It can take a while for benefit claims to be processed, so the sooner you apply, the sooner you'll get your money. Some benefits can be backdated but others cannot and you could lose out on money you are entitled to.
- DO hand over your application form in person if possible and ask for a receipt.
- DO keep photocopies of all the forms and supporting information you send in, in case your application gets lost.
- DO keep a note of the name of anyone you speak to about your benefit claim, the date you spoke to them and what they said
- DO contact an adviser if you are not certain whether you are eligible.
- DO take someone with you to any interviews if you feel you need support.
- DO keep the relevant benefit agencies informed if your circumstances change in any way, for example if you move, get a job or start a training course.
- DO take your national insurance number with you, as well as proof of your identity (such as a birth certificate or passport) and proof of your income (such as your benefit book or wage slips) when you apply for benefits.
- DO provide as much information to back up your claim as you possibly can. If you cannot provide all of the information the forms ask for, explain why and hand them in anyway.
- DO ask for your claim to be backdated if you think you have been eligible for a while and have a good reason for not applying sooner.
- DO get free advice from a local advice centre or Citizens Advice if you are unhappy with a benefit decision or the way your application has been handled.
- DON'T assume that you won't be eligible for a particular benefit. It's always worth making an application and getting advice if you are not sure whether you qualify. You can also visit [www.turn2us.co.uk](http://www.turn2us.co.uk) to get an idea of what you might be eligible for.
- DON'T give up because the forms look long and complicated. Ask someone at your local advice service or Citizens Advice to help you fill the forms in.
- DON'T be tempted to lie about anything on the form. If you are found out you will have to pay back any money that you have received that you were not entitled to. If you deliberately lie in order to claim benefit, you could be prosecuted.
- DON'T be embarrassed about including personal information on your application form. If you have a disability, for example, be sure to explain the real impact it has.
- DON'T assume that your claim is being processed if you haven't heard anything back yet. Ring the Benefits Agency, Jobcentre or council office to check what is happening.
- DON'T forget to apply for an interim payment if it takes a long time for your claim to be processed.
- DON'T assume that you can't be evicted if you are in arrears, even if this has happened because of a benefit delay. Get advice as soon as you can.
- DON'T go on a spending spree if you are overpaid benefits. In most cases you will have to pay the money back – deductions can be made from your future benefits if you don't have any other income.