

BLUE BADGE SCHEME

An Introduction

ME CONNECT HELPLINE: **0344 576 5326**

ME ASSOCIATION
INFORMATION LEAFLET

WHAT IS THE BLUE BADGE SCHEME?

The Blue Badge Scheme provides a range of parking concessions on public roads throughout the UK. The concessions are designed to assist people who have more severe problems with mobility and have difficulty using public transport.

Having a Blue Badge also means that your car should normally be exempt from wheel-clamping, or being towed away on both public and private roads – provided you are displaying your badge.

A Blue Badge usually lasts for up to 3 years. They cost up to £10 in England and £20 in Scotland, and are free in Wales.

You must reapply for a Blue Badge before your current one expires.

England and Wales:

■ To apply or renew a Blue Badge online:

<https://tinyurl.com/469bfcak>

■ To find out if you are eligible:

<https://tinyurl.com/2p22cm3s>

Northern Ireland:

<https://tinyurl.com/kswtbfp>

Scotland:

<https://tinyurl.com/23wsrb6z>

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFYING CRITERIA?

Children and adolescents can qualify for a Blue Badge but they must be two years old or over.

Automatic eligibility is available if you meet one of the following, for example

- get the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- get the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – scoring eight points or more in the 'moving around' part of the assessment
- have a permanent and substantial disability that causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking.

HIDDEN DISABILITIES

In 2019 the Blue Badge scheme was extended to people with 'hidden disabilities'.

The application will require information about:

- the nature of your disability,
- the maximum distance you can walk unaided
- the maximum distance you can walk without significant discomfort,
- whether you regularly use a walking aid e.g., wheelchair or walking stick,
- the extent to which you need help from someone else with driving,
- whether you are affected by any mental health problems that would make an unaccompanied journey difficult.



In particular, the new criteria extend eligibility to people who:

- cannot undertake a journey without there being a risk of serious harm to their health or safety, or that of any other person
- cannot undertake a journey without it causing them considerable psychological distress
- have very considerable difficulty when walking (both the physical act and the experience of walking).

HOW DO I APPLY?

Visit the Government website (above) and check your eligibility. You can apply online and will be directed to your local authority who make the final decision.

COMPLETING THE FORMS

If you meet one of the automatic qualifying criteria, then the application should be very straightforward.

If this is not the case, it is most important to provide accurate and up-to-date medical

information about your mobility problems.

Make an appointment to see your GP to discuss your mobility problems. It will help if your GP can provide a medical report in support of your application - although the local authority is likely to ask your GP for this information.

The application will require information about:

- the nature of your disability,
- the maximum distance you can walk unaided
- the maximum distance you can walk without significant discomfort,
- whether you regularly use a walking aid e.g., wheelchair or walking stick,
- the extent to which you need help from someone else with driving,
- whether you are affected by any mental health problems that would make an unaccompanied journey difficult.

Depending on the information you provide, and the policy of the local authority, you may be asked to attend a disability assessment with an occupational therapist.

APPEALING A DECISION

If you make an application online via the Government website, it will tell you why you are not eligible.

If your application is not approved by the local authority, they will let you know why it has not been approved.

You can ask for the decision to be reconsidered if you think the information provided wasn't taken



into account or if you have more recent information to provide.

You can also reapply if your mobility problems become more serious.

WHERE DOES THE SCHEME OPERATE?

Every country in the UK recognises Blue Badge parking concessions as do countries in the European Union.

London

If you live or plan to visit London, then there are specific rules for particular areas. Blue Badge holders are also exempt from the London Congestion Charge.

- This article provides an overview for visitors to London:

<https://tinyurl.com/4tt9kpdj>

- Transport for London provide this guide to parking:

<https://tinyurl.com/bbxhxymc>

Disabled Parking Options

You can visit this Government website, enter the postcode where you wish to park, and it will tell you the available options:

<https://tinyurl.com/3x8dkmbu>

Some local councils have their own rules for certain parking bays and streets. So it's important to check the signs or the local authority website if you are going somewhere unfamiliar.

Blue Badge in Europe

You should be able to obtain parking concessions in European countries that operate similar schemes. There is a free download of a guide to the use of parking cards for people with disabilities in

the EU. It can be found on the UK government's own website at :

<https://tinyurl.com/pdr672ju>

WHERE CAN I PARK?

Provided the vehicle is displaying a valid badge in the correct place, and it is being used by the disabled person for whom it was intended, you can normally:

- have free use of on-street parking meters and pay-and-display bays
- have exemptions from limits on parking times
- park for up to three hours on single or double yellow lines – so long as you are not causing an obstruction or there is not a ban on loading or unloading.

Although the scheme operates throughout the UK, there are small variations in the way it is applied.

For parking information:

- England and Wales:

<https://tinyurl.com/3x8dkmbu>

- Northern Ireland:

<https://tinyurl.com/kswtsbfp>

- Scotland:

<https://tinyurl.com/23wsrb6z>

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

- If you are a badge holder, it can only be used for your benefit.
- It is an offence if a badge is not removed from a vehicle and someone else takes advantage of the concessions.
- Misuse of the badge by a non-disabled person carries a fine of up to £1,000.

Increasing misuse of the scheme – and that includes theft of badges – means that many local authorities have tightened up their procedures. ■





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To Whom it may concern

Supportive evidence for a Blue Badge application from a person with ME/CFS

Date as Postmark

I have been asked to provide some background information on the classification, severity and prognosis/permanency of ME/CFS (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome) in relation to a Blue Badge application.

CLASSIFICATION

ME/CFS is recognised by the World Health Organisation as a neurological disease in section 8E49 Post-Viral Fatigue Syndromes (International Classification of Diseases – version 11).

The Department of Health has repeatedly made it clear that it fully accepts ME/CFS as a neurological disease and the NHS has adopted the WHO classification in its SNOMED-CT electronic health record.

See the information on our website here: <https://tinyurl.com/3kekehff>

SEVERITY

It is estimated that up to 25% of people with ME/CFS fall into the severely affected category at some stage in their illness. This means that they are largely or constantly housebound, wheelchair-bound or even bed-bound. Within this group are people very severely affected who are often extremely weak, unable to speak, intolerant to noise, smell, and touch, are unable to maintain adequate food or fluid intake and who may be malnourished. They are bedbound all of the time and need 24-hour care and support.

This level of severity inevitably involves significant problems with mobility, balance, being able to stand unaided, and cognitive function (i.e problems with memory and concentration). They also experience pain, which can like other symptoms, vary in intensity throughout the day, and may be musculoskeletal, arthralgic (affecting the joints) or neuropathic (nerve pain).

Those with moderate to severe ME/CFS will experience similar problems. And, while they are not normally house-bound or completely wheelchair-bound, they may not be able to walk unaided for more than a short distance.

The fact that a significant proportion of people with ME/CFS become moderately or severely affected, and consequently require various forms of practical assistance, which may include an indoor and/or outdoor wheelchair, is recognised by the Department of Work and Pensions in, for instance, their Work Capability Assessment Handbook.

Research studies that have examined functional status and quality of life measures in ME/CFS confirm that the scale of impairment across a range of physical and mental activities can be just as great or greater than is seen in many other long term medical conditions, including cancer (1,2,3,4).



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Please see the following references and information our website:

The MEA Association Disability Rating Scale: <https://tinyurl.com/5aez6rp7>

Nutrition Assessment and Malnutrition: <https://tinyurl.com/u2mvmc9r>

Severe ME: Helping You Cope: <https://tinyurl.com/49nmdesw>

PROGNOSIS

Research studies into long term outcome indicate in ME/CFS that only a small minority of people return to previous levels of health and functioning. For many people ME/CFS is a long-term medical condition and once symptoms have persisted for more than five years full recovery becomes rare (5).

Most people with ME/CFS fall into one of four broad groups:

1. Those who manage to return to normal health, or near normal health. The outlook for children and young people is generally considered to be better than for adults. Some may experience a significant recovery in functional ability and symptom severity within a couple of years, while for others it may take much longer.
2. The majority who make some degree of improvement and eventually stabilise. They then follow a fluctuating pattern with both good and bad periods of health. Relapses or exacerbations are often precipitated by:
 - a. Frequent episodes of post-exertional malaise (PEM) – a characteristic symptom of ME/CFS,
 - b. Infections, operations, temperature extremes, or stressful life events.
3. A significant minority who remain severely or very severely affected and normally require a great deal of care and support.
4. Those who show signs of deterioration. This is unusual but it does happen. When it occurs, a detailed medical re-assessment is advisable to rule out other possible causes. In the case of someone who becomes very severely affected, an increase in medical supervision and care will be necessary.

Please refer to **Prognosis, Permanency, and Quality of Life in ME/CFS**: <https://tinyurl.com/yp9mddte>

Government Guidance

In 2012, in response to concerns that people with ME/CFS were being unfairly denied blue badges by local authorities, Lord Attlee replied:

“It is for the relevant local authority to make decisions on whether or not a person is eligible for a badge. To help ensure consistency, the Department for Transport issues non-statutory guidance to local authorities on the factors that should be taken into account when they are making an assessment. As part of major reforms to the scheme, the department published updated guidance in June 2011 and again in February 2012.

“The guidance is intended to explain that eligibility for a badge under the ‘with further assessment’ criteria is not condition-specific. Local authorities should take into account the effect of a person’s condition on their ability to walk. The guidance gives examples of conditions like **myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME)** and mental and cognitive impairments like autism and dementia. In these cases, people might be eligible for a badge if their condition means they are unable to walk or have very considerable difficulty walking. They might, however, not be eligible if their ability to walk is unaffected.”



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This parliamentary reply makes it quite clear that people with ME/CFS should be eligible for a Blue Badge if their condition means that they are unable to walk, or have very considerable difficulty in walking.

Reference: <https://tinyurl.com/js63b8e7>

Dr Charles Shepherd
Hon Medical Adviser, ME Association

References:

- 1 Buchwald D et al. (1996) *Functional status in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome, other fatiguing illnesses, and healthy individuals.* *American Journal of Medicine*, 101, 364 - 370
- 2 Komaroff A et al. (1996) *Health status in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome and in the general population and disease comparison groups.* *American Journal of Medicine*, 101, 281 - 290
- 3 Nacul LC et al. (2011) *The functional status and well being of people with myalgic encephalomyelitis/ chronic fatigue syndrome and their carers.* *BMC Public Health*, 11, 402
- 4 Schweitzer R et al. (1995) *Quality of life in chronic fatigue syndrome.* *Social Science Medicine*, 41, 1367 - 1372
- 5 *A Report of the Chief Medical Officer's CFS/ME Working Group (2002), and separately its two published annexes, can be downloaded from The ME Association website at <https://tinyurl.com/2uth3n2e>*