

Reviewing Your Disability



If you receive Social Security disability or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, we'll review your medical condition from time to time to make sure you continue to have a qualifying disability.

Generally, if your health hasn't improved, or if your disability still keeps you from working, you'll continue to receive your benefits.

Our review process gives you the opportunity to show that you still have a qualifying disability and ensures that your benefits aren't stopped incorrectly. We'll completely evaluate all evidence about your condition. If you have more than one disabling condition, we'll consider the combined effect of all your impairments on your ability to work.

Below are some of the most frequently asked questions about Social Security disability reviews.

How often will my medical condition be reviewed?

The frequency of reviews depends on the nature and severity of your medical condition and whether it's expected to improve.

- If improvement is expected, your first review generally will be six to 18 months after the date you became disabled;
- If improvement is possible, but can't be predicted, we'll review your case about every three years; and
- If improvement is not expected, we'll review your case every seven years.

How will I be notified of a review?

When we decide a full medical review is needed, we'll send you a letter asking you to come to the Social Security office.

What happens during a review?

At the review, we'll ask how your medical condition affects you and whether it's improved. We'll ask you to bring your doctors' names, addresses, and phone numbers and to bring patient record numbers for any hospitals and other medical sources that have treated you since we last contacted you. If you've worked since you applied for disability benefits, or since your last review, we also need information about the dates you worked, the pay you received, and the kind of work you did.

Who'll make the disability decision?

We will send your case to the Disability Determination Services in your state. That agency makes disability decisions for Social Security. An experienced disability examiner will request medical reports from your doctors and from other places you go for treatment. The examiner and a medical consultant, who work together as a team, will carefully review all the information received for your case, and then make a decision.

How will they make the decision?

In most cases, the decision will be based on the information from your doctors, hospitals, or other medical sources. But, if the medical evidence is not complete or current, you may be asked to have a special examination at no cost to you. You'll be notified in writing of the date, time, and place.

What if I disagree with the decision?

You can appeal the decision if you disagree with it. This means you can ask us to look at your case again to see if our decision was correct. There are four levels of appeal and, generally, you have 60 days to appeal from one level to the next. The four levels are:

- **Reconsideration** — Your case is independently reviewed by people who had no part in the original decision. You may appear before a disability hearing officer who'll decide your appeal.
- **Hearing** — If you disagree with the reconsideration decision, you may request a hearing before an administrative law judge.
- **Appeals Council** — If you disagree with the administrative law judge's decision, you may ask for a review of the decision by the Appeals Council.
- **Federal court** — If you disagree with the Appeals Council decision, or if the Appeals Council decides not to review your case, you may bring a civil action in a federal court.

Under what circumstances would benefits be stopped?

Generally, cash benefits would be stopped only if the evidence shows that your medical condition has improved and that you can work regularly. As long as your condition hasn't improved, and you aren't able to work, your cash benefits will continue.

What if I try to work?

Social Security has several special rules that can help if you want to work.

If you're receiving Social Security disability benefits, and you've reported your work activity, you may have unlimited earnings during a trial work period of up to nine months (not necessarily in a row) and still receive full benefits. Other rules allow cash benefits and Medicare to continue while you attempt to work regularly.

If you're receiving SSI disability payments, you may continue to receive monthly payments while you work, as long as your income and resources continue to be under certain limits. If your cash payments stop because your total income exceeds the SSI limits, you may still be eligible for Medicaid.

We have other programs that can help you with work expenses, training, and rehabilitation. Ask your Social Security office for more information about special rules for people with disabilities who want to work.

Contacting Social Security

Visit www.socialsecurity.gov anytime to apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, www.socialsecurity.gov, is available to you anytime and anywhere!