

SOCIAL SECURITY FAQ

How much can I expect to get in Social Security benefits?

The amount of benefits to which you are entitled under any Social Security program is not related to financial need (except for SSI -- Supplemental Security Income), but is based on the income you have earned through years of working, through jobs and self-employment. Social Security keeps a record of these earnings over your working lifetime and pays benefits based on the average amount earned.

Your Social Security retirement benefits will vary depending on whether you claim them before or after your full retirement age (65-67, depending on the year you were born -- see "When can I start collecting Social Security benefits?," below). The longer you wait to start receiving payments, the higher your benefit amount will be. However, it's not always better to wait until your full retirement age to claim your Social Security benefits.

Who is eligible to collect Social Security benefits?



The specific eligibility requirements for Social Security benefits vary depending on the type of benefits, the age of the person filing the claim, and, if you are claiming as a dependent or survivor, the age of the worker.

There is one general requirement, however, that applies to all Social Security programs except for SSI (Supplemental Security Income): The worker on whose earnings record the benefit is to be paid must have worked in "covered employment" for a sufficient number of years -- that is, earned enough of what Social Security calls work credits -- by the time he or she claims retirement benefits, becomes disabled, or dies. This usually means a total of at least ten years of work.

For Social Security retirement benefits, you must be between the ages of 62 and 70 to start collecting benefits.

To check on your eligibility, see Social Security: Checking Your Earnings and Benefits or call the Social Security Administration at 800-772-1213.

When can I start collecting Social Security retirement benefits?

The Social Security Administration used to consider 65 to be full retirement age for the retirement benefit. Benefits amounts were calculated on the assumption that most workers will stop working full time and will claim retirement benefits when they reach age 65.

Now that people are generally living longer, Social Security's rules about what is considered full retirement age are changing. Age 65 is still considered full retirement age for anyone born before 1938. But full retirement age gradually increases from age 65 to 67 for people born in 1938 or later. For anyone born after 1960, the full retirement age is 67.

The system does provide for early retirement at age 62, but also offers higher benefits for people who wait to make their claims after reaching full retirement age.

Year Born	Full Retirement Age
1938	65 years, 2 months
1939	65 years, 4 months
1940	65 years, 6 months
1941	65 years, 8 months
1942	65 years, 10 months
1943 - 1954	66 years
1955	66 years, 2 months
1957	66 years, 6 months
1958	66 years, 8 months
1959	66 years, 10 months
1960 or later	67 years

How are my Social Security benefit amounts calculated?

The calculations are complicated. The amount of any benefit is determined by a formula based on the average of your yearly reported earnings since you began working.

But to complicate matters further, Social Security computes your average earnings differently depending on your age. If you reached age 62 or became disabled on or before December 31, 1978, Social Security averages the actual dollar value of your total past earnings -- and bases the amount of your monthly benefits on that amount.

If you turn 62 or become disabled on or after January 1, 1979, Social Security divides your earnings into two categories: Earnings from before 1951 are credited with their actual dollar amount, up to a maximum of \$3,000 per year; and from 1951 on, yearly limits are placed on earnings credits, no matter how much you actually earned in those years.



Can I keep a job even after I start collecting retirement, dependents, or survivors benefits?

Yes, and many people do just that. People who are past full retirement age may work and earn any amount without losing any of their Social Security benefits.

But before you reach full retirement age, Social Security will subtract money from your benefit check if you exceed a certain amount of earned income for the year (\$14,160 in 2010). The limit applies only to earnings from work; it does not apply to income from such things as savings, investments, pensions, or rental property. In other words, earnings from these sources will not affect your Social Security benefits.

The Social Security Administration has added a special twist for the year in which you reach full retirement age. During the 12 months prior to your birthday, you will lose one dollar of benefits for every three dollars you earn over a set monthly limit (\$3,010 per month in 2008). After your birthday, you can earn any amount of money without losing benefits.

Can I collect more than one type of benefit at a time?

No. You may qualify for more than one type of Social Security benefit at a time, but you can collect just one. For example, you might be eligible for both retirement and disability, or you might be entitled to benefits based on your own retirement as well as on that of your retired spouse. You can collect whichever one of these benefits is higher, but not both.

Can I claim spousal benefits if I'm divorced?

You are eligible for dependents benefits if both you and your former spouse have reached age 62, your marriage lasted at least ten years, and you have been divorced for at least two years. This two-year waiting period does not apply if your former spouse was already collecting retirement benefits before the divorce. You can collect benefits as soon as your former spouse is eligible for retirement benefits. He or she does not actually have to be collecting those benefits for you to collect your dependents benefits.

If you are collecting dependents benefits on your former spouse's work record and then marry someone else, you lose your right to those benefits. You may, however, be eligible to collect dependents benefits based on your new spouse's work record. If you divorce again, you can return to collecting benefits on your first spouse's record, or on your second spouse's record if you were married for at least ten years the second time around.

DON'T LET ANXIETY CONTROL YOUR LIFE

Anxiety is familiar to everyone due to the many stresses and complexities of modern life, but about 25 percent of U.S. adults have a serious problem with anxiety that must be addressed at some time in their lives.

*"Unlike fear, which is usually directed toward a concrete thing or event, such as a snarling dog or not meeting a deadline, anxiety is often nonspecific and can be brought on by worrying about the future, your finances or your health, in general," says Edmund Bourne, Ph.D., author of *Coping With Anxiety*. "Anxiety can appear in different forms and at different levels of intensity, and can range in severity from a mere twinge of uneasiness to a full-blown panic attack."*



The causes of anxiety are varied and include upsets in brain chemistry, heredity, childhood trauma, abuse, chronic stress, loss of a loved one, and drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few. "While it can be helpful to identify possible causes of anxiety and address them, you don't need to know why you feel anxious to be helped by practicing coping strategies," says Dr. Bourne.

COPING STRATEGIES

The following practices are helpful for anyone with anxiety and may be all that's needed if your anxiety level is mild and not disrupting your life. People with more severe anxiety, including anyone dealing with panic or post-traumatic stress disorder, will still find the exercises helpful but also may need therapy and medication. These exercises can be done individually or in any combination:

Take calming breaths

This exercise quickly interrupts the momentum of anxiety symptoms. Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five. Pause and hold your breath to a count of five. Exhale slowly to a count of five. Take two normal breaths, then repeat the cycle for three to five minutes.

Stop magnifying problems

Exaggerating problems by making them seem bigger and more serious than they are can lead to anxiety. To combat this way of thinking, stop using words such as terrible, awful, or horrendous in relation to events or situations in your life. Instead of saying to yourself, "It's unbearable," or "I can't stand it," try saying, "I can cope" and "I can deal with and survive this."

Stop worrisome thoughts

Use this strategy if you find yourself stuck in a spiral of worrisome thoughts that won't go away. "If you're alone and want to halt a chain of anxious thoughts, shout in a loud and forceful manner, 'Stop!' or 'Stop it!'" says Dr. Bourne. "If you're with other people, shout internally as you visualize a large stop sign." Every time the worrisome thoughts return, repeat the spoken or internal command to yourself.

Shift your point of view

When anxiety or worry about an actual or possible problem is getting the best of you, try thinking about the situation in the following ways:

- Tell yourself you can lighten up about it.
- Say the affirmation, "This too shall pass."
- Realize it's not likely to be as bad as your worst thoughts about it.

Combat negative self-talk

Positive affirmations can help you cope with anxiety in the moment and over the long-term by helping you change long-standing beliefs, which tend to enable anxiety. To make your thoughts more constructive and supportive, replace or refute each negative statement.

For example, replace "This is unbearable" with "I can learn to cope with this." Or, replace "What if this goes on without stopping?" with "I'll deal with this one day at a time."

"Resisting or fighting anxiety is likely to make it worse," says Dr. Bourne. "A more constructive approach is to cultivate an attitude that says, 'OK, here it is again. I can handle this. I've done it before.' In most cases, anxiety peaks and begins to subside in a few minutes. It will pass more quickly if you practice coping strategies regularly when you start to feel anxious."

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GETTING A GRIP ON MULTITASKING

A job that requires you to multitask has many facets -- and you're responsible for keeping all of them functioning at a high level. Being responsible for a range of activities and projects keeps your job interesting but it also can make you feel overwhelmed.

It takes skill to be successful at a job with many priorities. You must be organized, good at managing time and proficient in setting priorities. The following recommendations can help you increase your chance of being successful at every aspect of your job.



Analyze

The first step is to analyze your job. You need to know which tasks are required, and how to set priorities in getting them done. You also need to allot the appropriate amount of time to each task.

To begin, take two lined pieces of paper and title them Urgent Tasks and Plan-Ahead Tasks.

Urgent Tasks are those that must be done immediately, such as answering the phone, taking care of customers and dealing with the daily crises that are inevitable. List all of these on one sheet of paper.

Plan-Ahead Tasks are anything you can schedule in advance, such as writing a report, attending a meeting or planning for a new product or service. List all of these on a second paper.

Prioritize

Next, rate the tasks on each page as A, B or C, with A being the most important ones. This takes some thought, and you may want to get your supervisor's input.

Plan-Ahead tasks that are important for your company's future success also should rate an A. These are tasks such as developing a new product or doing market research.

The problem is, these important tasks can easily be set aside to take care of the more pressing ones. But it's essential to find time to do them, or your company's future may be at risk.

Schedule

The next step is to schedule these tasks on your calendar. To make it easier to organize your tasks, use four different colors to highlight them on your two lists, based on their frequencies:

- Daily Tasks = Yellow
- Weekly Tasks = Green
- Monthly Tasks = Blue
- Yearly Tasks = Pink

With your calendar and your two pages of tasks, set aside blocks of time for performing each task. Use the same color you used on your lists to highlight on your calendar the block of time for each task. That way, you'll be able to see at a glance if it's a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly task.

First schedule all of your A tasks, then the B's, followed by the C's.

Using your calendar enables you to see if you have enough time to do all the tasks assigned to you. More than likely, you'll discover you don't have enough time to do everything, so here are some options:

- Armed with your task lists and your calendar, go to your supervisor and together work out a doable plan.
- Search for ways to do some tasks more efficiently.
- Look for unnecessary tasks that can be eliminated. Look at those you rate as C and determine if they're necessary.

The more tasks you have, the more essential it is to plan. Set aside time each week to plan the next week. Look at your calendar and make any necessary adjustments.

Ensure success

Even after your plan has been put in place, it has to be managed. To do so, check your task list each week for items that can be eliminated or time frames that need to be expanded or shortened. If you do a little fine-tuning, your multiple priorities will cease to be a source of stress or frustration.

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