

## **Social Security: It Pays to Know (November 2016)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions\***

**Q. How do I apply for Social Security retirement benefits?**

- A. You should apply for retirement benefits three months before you want your payments to start. The easiest and most convenient way to apply for retirement benefits is by contacting the Social Security Administration or logging onto [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov).

**Q. How far in advance can I apply for Social Security retirement benefits?**

- A. You can apply for Social Security retirement benefits when you are at least 61 years and 9 months of age. You should apply three months before you want your benefits to start. Even if you are not ready to retire, you still should sign up for Medicare three months before your 65th birthday.

**Q. How can I get a Social Security Statement that shows a record of my earnings and an estimate of my future benefits?**

- A. You can get your personal *Social Security Statement* online at [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov) by using your my Social Security account. If you don't yet have an account, you can easily create one. To set up or use your account to get your online *Social Security Statement*, go to [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov), select *Sign in or Create an Account*.

Your online *Statement* gives you secure and convenient access to your earnings records. It also shows estimates for retirement, disability and survivors benefits that you and your family may be eligible for.

*Statements* are also mailed to workers attaining ages 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60 and older (three months prior to their birthday) if they don't receive Social Security benefits and do not have a my Social Security account.

**Q. Must I pay Social Security taxes on my earnings after full retirement age?**

- A. Everyone working in covered employment or self-employment regardless of age or eligibility for benefits must pay Social Security taxes.

**Q. What is full retirement age?**

- A. The current full retirement age is 66. The age when retired people can receive full benefits is increasing gradually to age 67. (The age for Medicare eligibility remains at 65.)

**Q. Can I withdraw my Social Security retirement claim and reapply later to increase my benefit amount?**

- A. Unexpected changes may occur after you apply to start your Social Security retirement benefits. If you change your mind, you may be able to withdraw your Social Security claim and re-apply at a future date. However, you must do this within 12 months of your original retirement.

**Q. What is the average monthly benefit for a retired worker?**

- A. The average monthly Social Security retirement benefit for January 2016 is \$1,341. The amount changes monthly.

**Q. Must I pay taxes on Social Security benefits?**

- A. Some people who get Social Security must pay federal income taxes on their benefits. But, no one pays taxes on more than 85 percent of their Social Security benefits.

You must pay taxes on your benefits if you file a federal tax return as an "individual" and your "combined income" exceeds \$25,000. If you file a joint return, you must pay taxes if you and your spouse have "combined income" of more than \$32,000. If you are married and file a separate return, you probably will have to pay taxes on your benefits.

**Q. I had additional earnings after I retired; will my monthly Social Security retirement benefit increase?**

A. Each year Social Security Administration reviews the records for all working Social Security recipients to see if additional earnings may increase their monthly benefit amounts. If an increase is due, they figure a new benefit amount and pay the increase retroactive to January following the year of earnings.

**Q. Will withdrawals from my individual retirement account affect my Social Security benefits?**

A. Social Security does not count pension payments, annuities, or the interest or dividends from your savings and investments as earnings. They do not lower your Social Security retirement benefits. However, withdrawals from an IRA or an employer sponsored retirement plan could impact the taxability of your Social Security benefit. Please visit [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov) for more information.

**Q. Can I get Social Security retirement benefits and military retirement benefits?**

A. You can get both Social Security retirement benefits and military retirement. Generally, the Social Security Administration does not reduce your Social Security benefits because of your military benefits.

**Q. If I get Social Security disability benefits and I reach full retirement age, will I then receive retirement benefits?**

A. Social Security disability benefits automatically change to retirement benefits when disability beneficiaries become full retirement age. The law does not allow a person to receive both retirement and disability benefits on one earnings record at the same time.

**Q. What is the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)?**

A. If your employer did not take Social Security taxes out of your earnings, and you have earned a pension based on that work, the Windfall Elimination Provision could reduce your Social Security benefit. However, if you paid Social Security tax on 30 years of substantial earnings you are not affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision. To get more information, please visit [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

**Q. What is the eligibility for Social Security spouse's benefits and my own retirement benefits?**

A. If you have not worked or do not have enough Social Security credits to qualify for your own Social Security benefits, you may be able to receive spouse's benefits.

To qualify for spouse's benefits, you must be:

- At least 62 years of age; or
- Any age and caring for a child entitled to receive benefits on your spouse's record who is younger than age 16 or disabled.

If you are eligible for both your own retirement benefits and for benefits as a spouse, we always pay your own benefits first. If your benefits as a spouse are higher than your own retirement benefits, you will get a combination of benefits equaling the higher spouse benefit.

If you choose to begin receiving spouse's benefits before you reach full retirement age, your benefit amount will be reduced and will not be increased when you reach full retirement age.

\*Source: SSA.GOV

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