



Common Social Security questions answered

Read the FAQ below to get a better understanding of Social Security and the role it might play in a comprehensive retirement plan. Visit SSA.gov to learn more.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Do I qualify for Social Security?

A: You're eligible for Social Security retirement benefits if you're 62 or older and if you've worked and paid Social Security taxes for 10 years or more. You may also be able to get additional benefits based on your current or former spouse's work.

Q: Are children eligible for Social Security?

A: When a parent receives Social Security retirement or disability benefits, their child may also be eligible to receive benefits. The child must be:

- Unmarried
- Younger than age 18
or
- Between ages 18 and 19 and a full-time student at an elementary or secondary school
or
- Age 18 or older with a disability that began before age 22

Q: When should I start taking benefits?

A: Deciding when to take Social Security benefits is up to you and dependent on your own personal and financial situation. If you start receiving benefits before your Full Retirement Age (FRA), which is between ages 66 and 67 depending on your birthday, your benefit amount will be reduced. When you delay your benefits until after your FRA, you can be eligible for delayed retirement credits that can increase your monthly benefit.

Q: I am divorced and my ex-husband was the higher earner. Can I apply for Social Security benefits on his record?

A: If you were married for at least 10 years, you may be eligible for Family benefits based on your ex-spouse's work record. Some valid non-marital legal relationships may qualify too. Learn more at ssa.gov/family.

Q: I am a stay-at-home parent. Am I eligible for benefits?

A: If you are a married person with little to no earnings history, you can still qualify for Social Security benefits on your spouse's record, provided that he or she is receiving benefits. If your spouse is not yet receiving retirement or disability benefits, you will have to wait to apply on your spouse's record until such time as they start receiving benefits. As a non-working spouse, you could be eligible to receive a benefit up to 50% of the amount your spouse is eligible to receive at FRA.

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

A: Social Security benefit amounts can vary from person to person based on their lifetime earnings and at what age they begin receiving benefits. Each payment amount can also change on a monthly basis. The estimated average benefit for a retired worker as of September 2024 was about \$1,921 per month.

Q: What if I keep working while drawing Social Security?

A: Some retirees may choose to work while receiving Social Security benefits. You can receive benefits while being employed, but there is a limit to how much can be earned and still be eligible for benefits. If you're younger than your FRA, you can earn up to \$23,400 in 2025 before losing one benefit dollar for each \$2 earned above the limit. In the year you reach your FRA, the wage limit increases to \$62,160 for 2025 and the penalty decreases to \$1 withheld for every \$3 earned above the limit. Earnings are only counted up to the month before you reach your FRA, not your earnings for the entire year. Once the month your FRA is reached, benefits are no longer reduced due to earnings.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) *continued*

Q: How is Social Security taxed?

A: For many people, Social Security retirement benefits are subject to federal income tax, but a portion can be exempt from taxation. Typically, you pay tax on 85 percent of your benefits if you:

- File a tax return as an individual and combined income is more than \$25,000
- File a joint return and you and your spouse has combined income of more than \$32,000
- Are married and file a separate tax return

A tax professional can explain how Social Security benefits are taxed and how these taxes may impact your individual situation.

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

A: Any pensions payments or withdrawals from retirement accounts, annuities, or investments do not lower Social Security retirement benefits.

Q: Can I get Social Security retirement benefits and military retirement benefits?

A: An individual who receives military retirement benefits can also be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, generally without a reduction in the payout amount.

Q: Will Social Security run out before I retire?

A: While many people are concerned about the future of Social Security, the program is unlikely to run out of money. However, changes will be needed to protect the security of the program. According to the 2024 Social Security Trustees report, retirees will start receiving a reduced benefit in 2034 if a funding solution is not found for the program.

After that time, retirees may only receive 79% of their full benefit. Because of the uncertainty of the program, it's important to create a comprehensive retirement income plan that can create adequate savings for the future.

When it's time to apply for Social Security retirement benefits, you can use the Social Security Administration (SSA) online retirement application at ssa.gov for a quick and convenient way to get started.

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