

Social Security's Secrets

Helen P O'Planick

1

Social Security is one of our
most open secrets

- Age that you can start to collect
- Who can you collect on
- When should you collect

2

When can I collect?

- You can collect social security benefits from birth!
 - Disabled parent
 - Deceased parent
 - Parent already collecting
 - Adoption!
 - Dependent Parents

3

SSDI

- To receive social security disability insurance, you must have a work history and be disabled for over a year.
 - If your disability started in or before the calendar quarter in which you turn 24, you must have earned at least six credits (equivalent to a year and a half of work) in the prior three years to pass the recent work test.
 - Between the ages of 24 and 31, you must have spent at least half the time since turning 21 in covered work. For example, if your disability dates to the quarter when you turned 29, you will need to have earned 16 credits (worked four years) in the previous eight years.
 - Beyond age 31, the test is five years (20 credits) of work in the decade immediately before you the onset of your disability.

4

SSI

- To qualify for SSI, you must be at least 65 years old, blind or have a disability and have very limited financial resources. In 2024, the maximum monthly benefit available from federal funds is \$943 a month for an individual and \$1,415 for a couple who are both eligible for the program. Social Security subtracts what it considers “countable income” from the benefit, so if your countable income exceeds the figures above, you can't receive SSI.
 - Pension, regular SS, earned income counts.
 - Food stamps and other government aid does not count.
 - Assets count.
 - Not your home or car, but investments, etc.

5

Widow/Widower Benefits

- In most cases, a widow or widower qualifies for survivor benefits if he or she is at least 60 and was married to the deceased for at least nine months at the time of death. There are a few exceptions to those requirements:
 - If the late spouse's death was accidental or occurred in the line of U.S. military duty, there's no length-of-marriage requirement.
 - You can apply for survivor benefits as early as age 50 if you have a disability that occurred within seven years of your spouse's death.
 - If you care for children from the marriage who are under 16 or have a disability, you can apply at any age.
- Whether you have wed again can also affect eligibility. If the remarriage took place before you turned 60 (50 if you have a disability), you cannot draw survivor benefits. You regain eligibility if that marriage ends. And there is no effect on eligibility for survivor benefits if you remarry at or past those ages.

6

Should I collect at 62?

- How long are you going to live?
- What are your life plans?
 - Are you going to continue to work?
 - How much are you planning on earning if anything?
 - Do you have insurance?
 - Household income?

7

Should I collect at 62?

- You can earn up to \$23,400 for 2025.
 - Benefits are reduced \$1 for every \$2 over the limit.
 - SS will reconcile and reduce 2026 benefits.

8

Should I collect at 65?

- Depends on your birth year and your full retirement age.
- Need to sign up for Medicare Part A
- Might need to sign up for Medicare Part B
 - May be able to stay on your current plan or spouse's plan if it qualifies.

9

Year of Full Retirement

- Earning limited to \$62,160 before your birthday.
- Reduction of \$1 for every \$3 earned up to your birthday.

10

Who can I collect on?

- My parents (minor)
- My spouse
- My ex-spouse
- My child
- Myself

11

Survivor Benefits

- Widow/widower benefits are allowed providing at least 9 months of marriage.
- Ex-spousal benefits are allowed providing a ten year or more marriage.

12

Survivor Category	Benefit Percentage of Worker's PIA
Widow(er) at full retirement age	100%
Widow(er) at age 60	71–99% (depending on claiming age)
Widow(er) with child under 16	75%
Each eligible child	75%
One dependent parent	82.5%
Two dependent parents	75% each

13

Family Maximum Rules

- The maximum family benefit is the maximum monthly amount that can be paid on a worker's earnings record. There is a special formula for computing the maximum benefits payable to the family of a disabled worker. It is more common to use the family maximum for retirement and survivor benefits.
- The formula used to compute the family maximum is similar to that used to compute the Primary Insurance Amount (PIA). The formula sums four separate percentages of portions of the worker's PIA. For 2026 these portions are the first \$1,643, the amount between \$1,643 and \$2,371, the amount between \$2,371 and \$3,093, and the amount over \$3,093. These dollar amounts are the "bend points" of the family-maximum formula. Thus, the family-maximum bend points for 2026 are \$1,643, \$2,371, and \$3,093.

14

Family Maximum Rules

- For the family of a worker who becomes age 62 or dies in 2026 before attaining age 62, the total amount of benefits payable will be computed so that it does not exceed:
 - (a) 150 percent of the first \$1,643 of the worker's PIA, plus
 - (b) 272 percent of the worker's PIA over \$1,643 through \$2,371, plus
 - (c) 134 percent of the worker's PIA over \$2,371 through \$3,093, plus
 - (d) 175 percent of the worker's PIA over \$3,093.