



Securing today
and tomorrow

Understanding the Benefits

[SSA.gov](https://www.ssa.gov)



What's inside

Social Security: a simple concept 1

What you need to know about Social Security while you're working 4

What you need to know about benefits 6

Benefits for your family 11

When you're ready to apply for benefits 14

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program 16

Right to appeal 16

Online “*my* Social Security” account 17

Medicare 18

Some facts about Social Security 22

Contacting Social Security 23



Social Security: a simple concept

Social Security reaches almost every family, and at some point, touches the lives of nearly all Americans.

Social Security helps older Americans, workers who become disabled, and families in which a spouse or parent dies. As of June 2020, about 180 million people worked and paid Social Security taxes and about 65 million people received monthly Social Security benefits.

Most of our beneficiaries are retirees and their families — about 49 million people in June 2020.

But Social Security was never meant to be the only source of income for people when they retire. Social Security replaces a percentage of a worker's pre-retirement income based on your lifetime earnings. The amount of your average wages that Social Security retirement benefits replaces varies depending on your earnings and when you choose to start benefits. If you start benefits in 2021 at your "full retirement age" (see our "**Full retirement age**" section), this percentage ranges from as much as 78 percent for very low earners, to about 42 percent for medium earners, to about 28 percent for high earners. If you start benefits after full retirement age, these percentages would be higher. If you start benefits earlier, these percentages would be lower. Most financial advisers say you will need about 70 percent of pre-retirement income to live comfortably in retirement, including your Social Security benefits, investments, and personal savings.

We want you to understand what Social Security can mean to you and your family's financial future. This publication, *Understanding the Benefits*, explains the basics of the Social Security retirement, disability, and survivors insurance programs.

The current Social Security system works like this: when you work, you pay taxes into Social Security. We use the tax money to pay benefits to:

- People who have already retired.
- People who are disabled.
- Survivors of workers who have died.
- Dependents of beneficiaries.

The money you pay in taxes isn't held in a personal account for you to use when you get benefits. We use your taxes to pay people who are getting benefits right now. Any unused money goes to the Social Security trust funds, not a personal account with your name on it.

Social Security is more than retirement

Many people think of Social Security as just a retirement program. Most of the people receiving benefits are retired, but others receive benefits because they're:

- Disabled.
- A spouse or child of someone getting benefits.
- A divorced spouse of someone getting or eligible for Social Security.
- A spouse or child of a worker who died.
- A divorced spouse of a worker who died.
- A dependent parent of a worker who died.

Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for Social Security at any age. In fact, Social Security pays more benefits to children than any other government program.

Your Social Security taxes

We use the Social Security taxes you and other workers pay into the system to pay Social Security benefits.

You pay Social Security taxes based on your earnings, up to a certain amount. In 2021, that amount is \$142,800.

Medicare taxes

You pay Medicare taxes on all of your wages or net earnings from self-employment. These taxes are for Medicare coverage.

If you work for someone else	Social Security tax	Medicare tax
You pay	6.2%	1.45%
Your employer pays	6.2%	1.45%
If you're self-employed		
You pay	12.4%	2.9%

Additional Medicare tax

Workers pay an additional 0.9 percent Medicare tax on income exceeding certain thresholds. The following chart shows the threshold amounts based on tax filing status:

Filing status	Threshold amount
Married filing jointly	\$250,000
Married filing separately	\$125,000
Single	\$200,000
Head of household (with qualifying person)	\$200,000
Qualifying widow(er) with dependent child	\$200,000

Where your Social Security tax dollars go

In 2021, when you work, 85 cents of every Social Security tax dollar you pay goes to a trust fund that pays monthly benefits to current retirees and their families and to surviving spouses and children of workers who have died. About 15 cents goes to a trust fund that pays benefits to people with disabilities and their families.

From these trust funds, Social Security also pays the costs of managing the Social Security programs. The Social Security Administration is one of the most efficient agencies in the federal government, and we're working to make it better every day. Of each Social Security tax dollar you pay, we spend less than one penny to manage the program.

The entire amount of Medicare taxes you pay goes to a trust fund that pays some of the costs of hospital and related care for all Medicare beneficiaries. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, not the Social Security Administration, manages Medicare.

What you need to know about Social Security while you're working

Your Social Security number

Your link with Social Security is your Social Security number. You need it to get a job and pay taxes. We use your Social Security number to track your earnings while you're working and your benefits after you're getting Social Security.

Don't carry your Social Security card. You should be careful about giving someone your Social Security number. Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes today. Most of the time, identity thieves use your Social Security number and your good credit to apply for more credit in your name. Then, they use the credit cards and don't pay the bills.

Your Social Security number and our records are confidential. If someone else asks us for information we have about you, we won't give any information without your written consent, unless the law requires or permits it.

Contact us if you need a Social Security number, or if you need to change your name on your current card. If you just need a replacement Social Security card, you **can** request one online using your free, personal *my* Social Security account as long as you are not requesting a name change or any other change to your card, and you meet other requirements. If you are unable to request a replacement card online, please contact us.

If you need to change your name on your current card, we will ask you to complete a simple application and ask to see certain documents. We need to see originals or copies certified by the issuing office. We can't accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents.

To get a Social Security number or a replacement card, you must prove your U.S. citizenship or immigration status, age, and identity. We don't need proof of your U.S. citizenship and age for a replacement card if they're already in our records. We only accept certain documents as proof of U.S. citizenship. These include your U.S. birth certificate, U.S. passport, Certificate of Naturalization, or Certificate of Citizenship. If you aren't a U.S. citizen, we must see your immigration document proving work authorization. If you don't have work authorization, different rules apply.

For proof of identity, we accept current documents showing your name, identifying information and preferably a recent photograph, such as a driver's license or other state-issued identification card, or a U.S. passport.

To apply for a change of name on your Social Security card, you must show a recently issued document that proves your name has been legally changed.

Be sure to safeguard your Social Security card. We limit the number of replacement cards you can get to three in a year and 10 during your lifetime. Legal name changes and other exceptions don't count toward these limits. For

example, changes in noncitizen status that require card updates may not count toward these limits. These limits may not apply if you can prove you need the card to prevent a significant hardship.

For more information, read *Your Social Security Number and Card* (Publication No. 05-10002). If you aren't a citizen, read *Social Security Numbers for Noncitizens* (Publication No. 05-10096).

All of our card services are free. Social Security never charges for the card services we provide.

How you become eligible for Social Security

As you work and pay taxes, you earn Social Security “credits.” In 2021, you earn one credit for each \$1,470 in earnings — up to a maximum of four credits per year. The amount of money needed to earn one credit usually goes up every year.

Most people need 40 credits (10 years of work) to qualify for benefits. Younger people need fewer credits to be eligible for disability benefits or for their family members to be eligible for survivors benefits when the worker dies.

What you need to know about benefits

Social Security benefits only replace some of your earnings when you retire, become disabled, or die. We base your benefit payment on how much you earned during your working career. Higher lifetime earnings result in higher benefits. If there were some years when you didn't work, or had low earnings, your benefit amount may be lower than if you worked steadily.

Retirement benefits

Choosing when to start receiving retirement benefits is one of the most important decisions you'll make in your lifetime. If you choose to start receiving benefits when

you reach your full retirement age, you'll receive your full benefit amount. We will reduce your benefit amount if you begin benefits before reaching full retirement age. You can also choose to keep working beyond your full retirement age. If you do, your benefit will increase from the time you reach full retirement age, until you start receiving benefits, or until you reach age 70.

Full retirement age

If you were born from 1943 to 1960, the age at which full retirement benefits are payable increases gradually to age 67. In 2021, if your birth year is 1954 or earlier, you are already eligible for your full Social Security benefit. Use the following chart to find out your full retirement age.

Year of birth	Full retirement age
1943-1954	66
1955	66 and 2 months
1956	66 and 4 months
1957	66 and 6 months
1958	66 and 8 months
1959	66 and 10 months
1960 or later	67

NOTE: *Although the full retirement age is rising, you should still apply for Medicare benefits three months before your 65th birthday. If you wait longer, your Medicare medical insurance (Part B) and prescription drug coverage (Part D) may cost you more money.*

Delayed retirement

If you choose to delay receiving benefits beyond your full retirement age, we'll increase your benefit a certain percentage, depending on the year of your birth. We'll add the increase automatically each month from the time you reach full retirement age, until you start taking

benefits or reach age 70, whichever comes first. There is more information on delayed retirement credits on our website at www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/planner/delayret.html.

Early retirement

You may start receiving benefits as early as age 62. We reduce your benefits if you start early by about one-half of one percent for each month you start receiving benefits before your full retirement age. For example, if your full retirement age is 66 and ten months, and you sign up for Social Security when you're 62, you would only get about 70.8 percent of your full benefit.

NOTE: *The reduction will be greater in future years as the full retirement age increases.*

Once you've made the decision about when to start benefits, you can apply for Social Security retirement benefits on our website at www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/apply.html.

If you work and get benefits

You can continue to work and still receive retirement benefits. Your earnings in (or after) the month you reach full retirement age won't reduce your Social Security benefits. In fact, working beyond full retirement age can increase your benefits. We'll have to reduce your benefits, however, if your earnings exceed certain limits for the months before you reach your full retirement age.

If you work, but start receiving benefits before full retirement age, we deduct one dollar in benefits for each two dollars in earnings you have above the annual limit. In 2021, the limit is \$18,960.

In the year you reach your full retirement age, we reduce your benefits by one dollar for every three dollars you earn over a different annual limit (\$50,520 in 2021) until the month you reach full retirement age.

Once you reach full retirement age, you can keep working, and we won't reduce your Social Security benefit, no matter how much you earn.

For more information about how work affects your benefits, read *How Work Affects Your Benefits* (Publication No. 05-10069).

NOTE: *People who work and receive disability or Supplemental Security Income payments have different earnings rules. They must immediately report all their earnings to Social Security no matter how much they earn.*

Retirement benefits for widows and widowers

If you're receiving widow's or widower's benefits, you can switch to your own retirement benefits as early as age 62, assuming your retirement benefit is more than the amount you receive on your deceased spouse's earnings. Often, you can begin receiving one benefit at a reduced rate and then switch to the other benefit at the full rate when you reach full retirement age. The rules are complicated and vary depending on your situation, so talk to a Social Security representative about the choices available to you.

For more information about retirement benefits, read *Retirement Benefits* (Publication No. 05-10035).

Disability benefits

If you can't work because of a physical or mental condition that's expected to last at least one year or result in death, you may be eligible for Social Security disability benefits.

Our disability rules are different from private or other government agency plans. Qualifying for disability from another agency or program doesn't mean you will be eligible for disability benefits from us. Having a statement from your doctor saying you're disabled doesn't mean you'll automatically be eligible for Social Security disability benefits. For more information about Social Security disability benefits, read *Disability Benefits* (Publication No. 05-10029). You can apply for Social Security disability benefits on our website at www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability.

People, including children, who have little income and few resources, and who have a disability, may be eligible for disability payments through the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. For more information about SSI, read *Supplemental Security Income (SSI)* (Publication No. 05-11000).

If you become disabled, file for disability benefits as soon as possible, because it usually takes several months to process a disability claim. We may be able to process your claim more quickly if you have the following when you apply:

- Medical records and treatment dates from your doctors, therapists, hospitals, clinics, and caseworkers.
- Your laboratory and other test results.
- The names, addresses, phone, and fax numbers of your doctors, clinics, and hospitals.
- The names of all medications you're taking.
- The names of your employers and job duties for the last 15 years.

Your benefits may be taxable

Some people who get Social Security will have to pay taxes on their benefits. About 40 percent of our current beneficiaries pay taxes on their benefits.

You may have to pay taxes on your benefits if you file a federal tax return as an “individual” and your total income is more than \$25,000. If you file a joint return, you may have to pay taxes if you and your spouse have a total income that is more than \$32,000. For more information, call the Internal Revenue Service’s toll-free number, **1-800-829-3676**.

Benefits for your family

When you start receiving Social Security retirement or disability benefits, other family members may also be eligible to receive benefits. For example, benefits can be paid to your spouse:

- If they’re age 62 or older.
- At any age if they’re caring for your child (the child must be younger than 16 or disabled and entitled to Social Security benefits on your record).

Benefits can also be paid to your unmarried children if they’re:

- Younger than 18.
- Between 18 and 19 years old, but in elementary or secondary school as full-time students.
- Age 18 or older and disabled (the disability must have started before age 22).

Under certain circumstances, we can also pay benefits to a stepchild, grandchild, step-grandchild, or an adopted child. If you become the parent of a child after you begin receiving benefits, let us know about the child, so we can decide if the child is eligible for benefits.

How much can family members get?

Each family member may be eligible for a monthly benefit that is up to half of your retirement or disability benefit amount. However, there is a limit to the total amount of

money that can be paid to you and your family. The limit varies, but is generally equal to about 150 to 180 percent of your retirement or disability benefit.

If you're divorced

If you're divorced, your ex-spouse may qualify for benefits on your earnings. In some situations, they may get benefits even if you aren't receiving them. To qualify, a divorced spouse must:

- Have been married to you for at least 10 years.
- Have been divorced from you at least two years if you have not filed for benefits yet.
- Be at least 62 years old.
- Be unmarried.
- Depending on the circumstances, not be entitled to or eligible for a benefit on their own work that is equal to or higher than half the full amount on your record.

Survivors benefits

When you die, your family may be eligible for benefits based on your work.

Family members who can collect benefits include a widow or widower who is:

- 60 or older.
- 50 or older and disabled.
- Any age if they're caring for your child who is younger than 16 or disabled and entitled to Social Security benefits on your record.

Your children can receive benefits, too, if they're unmarried and:

- Younger than 18 years old.
- Between 18 and 19 years old, but in an elementary or secondary school as full-time students.

- Age 18 or older and disabled (the disability must have started before age 22).

Additionally, your parents can receive benefits on your earnings if they were dependent on you for at least half of their support.

One-time payment after death

If you have enough credits, a one-time payment of \$255 also may be made after your death. This benefit may be paid to your spouse or minor children if they meet certain requirements.

If you're divorced and have a surviving ex-spouse

If you're divorced, your ex-spouse may be eligible for survivor's benefits based on your earnings when you die. They must:

- Be at least age 60 years old (or 50 if disabled) and have been married to you for at least 10 years.
- Be any age if they're caring for a child who is eligible for benefits based on your earnings.
- Not be entitled to a benefit based on their own work that is equal or higher than the full insurance amount on your record.
- Not be currently married, unless the remarriage occurred after age 60 or after age 50 if disabled.

Benefits paid to an ex-spouse won't affect the benefit rates for other survivors receiving benefits on your earnings record.

NOTE: *If you're deceased and your ex-spouse remarries after age 60, they may be eligible for Social Security benefits based on either your work or the new spouse's work, whichever is higher.*

How much will your survivors get?

Your survivors receive a percentage of your basic Social Security benefit — usually in a range from 75 to 100 percent each. However, there is a limit to the amount of money that can be paid each month to a family. The limit varies, but is generally equal to about 150 to 180 percent of your benefit rate.

When you're ready to apply for benefits

You should apply for benefits about four months before the date you want your benefits to start. If you aren't ready to apply for retirement benefits yet but are thinking about it, you should visit our website to use our informative retirement planner at [**www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement**](http://www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement). To file for disability or survivors benefits, you should apply as soon as you're eligible.

You can apply for benefits on our website at [**www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement**](http://www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement).

If you have a *my* Social Security account, you can get an estimate of your personal retirement benefits and see the effects of different retirement age scenarios. If you don't have a *my* Social Security account, create one at [**www.ssa.gov/myaccount**](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount).

You also can get more detailed benefit calculations at [**www.ssa.gov/benefits/calculators**](http://www.ssa.gov/benefits/calculators).

What you will need to apply

When you apply for benefits, we will ask you to provide certain documents. The documents you'll need depend on the type of benefits you file for. Providing these documents to us quickly will help us pay your benefits faster. You must present original documents or copies certified by the issuing office — we can't accept photocopies.

Don't delay filing an application just because you don't have all the documents you need. We'll help you get them.

Some documents you may need when you sign up for Social Security are:

- Your Social Security card (or a record of your number).
- Your birth certificate.
- Your children's birth certificates and Social Security numbers (if you're applying for them).
- Proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful immigration status if you (or a child) weren't born in the United States.
- Your spouse's birth certificate and Social Security number if they are applying for benefits based on your earnings.
- Your marriage certificate (if signing up on a spouse's earnings or if your spouse is signing up on your earnings).
- Your military discharge papers if you had military service.
- Your most recent W-2 form, or your tax return, if you're self-employed.

We will let you know if you need other documents when you apply.

How we pay benefits

You must receive your Social Security payments electronically. One of the ways you can choose to receive your benefits is through direct deposit to your account at a financial institution. Direct deposit is a simple, and secure way to receive your payments. Be sure to have your checkbook or account statement with you when you apply. We will need that information, as well as your financial institution's routing number, to make sure your monthly benefit deposit goes into the right account.

If you don't have an account with a financial institution, or if you prefer to receive your benefits on a prepaid debit card, you can sign up for the Direct Express® card program. With Direct Express®, payments go straight to the card account. Another payment choice you can consider is an electronic transfer account. This low-cost federally insured account lets you enjoy the security and convenience of automatic payments.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program

If you have limited income and resources (things you own), SSI may be able to help. SSI financing comes from general revenues, not Social Security taxes.

SSI makes monthly payments to people who are age 65 or older or who are blind or disabled. We don't count some of your income and some of your resources when we decide whether you're eligible for SSI. Your house and your car, for example, usually don't count as resources.

To apply for SSI, you can begin the process and — in some cases — complete most or all of your application online by visiting our website at www.ssa.gov/applyforbenefits. You can also call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** to set up an appointment with a representative from your local Social Security office.

Right to appeal

If you disagree with a decision made on your claim, you can appeal it. You can handle your own appeal with free help from Social Security, or you can choose to have a representative help you. We can give you information about organizations that can help you find a representative. For more information about the appeals process and selecting a representative, read *Your Right to Question the Decision Made on Your Claim* (Publication No. 05-10058).

Online “*my* Social Security” account

You can now easily set up a secure online *my* Social Security account to access your *Social Security Statement* to check your earnings and get your benefit estimates. You may also be able to use your online *my* Social Security account to request a replacement Social Security number card (available in many states and the District of Columbia). If you currently receive benefits, you can also:

- Get your benefit verification letter.
- Change your address and phone number.
- Request a replacement Medicare card.
- Get a replacement SSA-1099 or SSA-1042S for tax season.
- Start or change your direct deposit.
- Opt out of getting agency notices by mail for those available online.
- Report your wages if you work and receive Social Security disability insurance benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments, or both.

You can create a *my* Social Security account if you’re age 18 or older and have a Social Security number, valid email address, and U.S. mail address. To create an account, go to www.ssa.gov/myaccount. You will need to provide some personal information to confirm your identity, and then choose a username and password.

Medicare

Medicare is our country's basic health insurance program for people age 65 or older and for many people with disabilities.

You shouldn't confuse Medicare with Medicaid. Medicaid is a health care program for people with low income and limited resources. State health and human services offices or social services agencies run the Medicaid program. Some people qualify for just one program, while others qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid.

Parts of Medicare

Social Security enrolls you in Original Medicare (Part A and Part B).

- Medicare Part A (hospital insurance) helps pay for inpatient care in a hospital or limited time at a skilled nursing facility (following a hospital stay). Part A also pays for some home health care and hospice care.
- Medicare Part B (medical insurance) helps pay for services from doctors and other health care providers, outpatient care, home health care, durable medical equipment, and some preventive services.
- Medicare Advantage Plan (previously known as Part C) includes all benefits and services covered under Part A and Part B — prescription drugs and additional benefits such as vision, hearing, and dental — bundled together in one plan.
- Medicare Part D (Medicare prescription drug coverage) helps cover the cost of prescription drugs.

Who's eligible for Medicare Part A?

Most people get Part A when they turn 65. You qualify for it automatically if you're eligible for Social Security or Railroad Retirement Board benefits. Or, you may qualify based on a spouse's (including a divorced spouse's)

work. Others qualify because they're government employees not covered by Social Security, who paid the Medicare tax.

If you get Social Security disability benefits for 24 months, you'll qualify for Part A.

If you get Social Security disability benefits because you have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease), you don't have to wait 24 months to qualify.

Also, someone with permanent kidney failure requiring dialysis or kidney replacement qualifies for Part A if they've worked long enough, or is the spouse or child of a worker who qualifies.

If you don't meet these requirements, you may be able to get Medicare hospital insurance by paying a monthly premium. For more information, call our toll-free number or visit ***Medicare.gov***.

Certain people who were exposed to environmental health hazards are entitled to Part A and can enroll in Part B and Part D. These people have an asbestos-related disease and were present for at least six months in Lincoln County, Montana, 10 years or more before diagnosis.

Who's eligible for Medicare Part B?

Almost every person eligible for Part A can get Part B. Part B is optional and you usually pay a monthly premium. In 2021, the standard monthly premium is \$148.50. Some people with higher incomes pay higher premiums.

Medicare Advantage plans

Anyone who has Medicare Part A and Part B can join a Medicare Advantage plan. Medicare Advantage plans include:

- Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) plans.
- Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) plans.

- Private Fee-for-Service (PFFS) plans.
- Special Needs Plans (SNPs).

In addition to your Medicare Part B premium, you might have to pay another monthly premium because of the extra benefits the Medicare Advantage plan offers.

Who can get Medicare Part D?

Anyone who has Original Medicare (Part A or Part B) is eligible for Medicare prescription drug coverage (Part D). Part D benefits are available as a stand-alone plan or built into Medicare Advantage, unless you have a Medicare private fee-for-service (PFFS) plan. The drug benefits work the same in either plan. Joining a Medicare prescription drug plan is voluntary, and you pay an extra monthly premium for the coverage.

When should I apply for Medicare?

If you're not already getting benefits, you should contact Social Security about three months before your 65th birthday to sign up for Medicare. You should sign up for Medicare even if you don't plan to retire at age 65.

If you're already getting Social Security benefits or Railroad Retirement Board payments, we'll contact you a few months before you become eligible for Medicare and send you information. If you live in one of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, we'll automatically enroll you in Medicare Parts A and B. However, because you must pay a premium for Part B coverage, you can choose to turn it down.

We will **not** automatically enroll you in a Medicare prescription drug plan (Part D). Part D is optional and you must elect this coverage. For the latest information about Medicare, visit ***Medicare.gov*** or call **1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)** or TTY number, **1-877-486-2048** if you're deaf or hard of hearing.

NOTES: *If you don't enroll in Part B and Part D when you're first eligible, you may have to pay a late enrollment penalty for as long as you have Part B and Part D coverage. Also, you may have to wait to enroll, which will delay coverage.*

Residents of Puerto Rico or foreign countries won't receive Part B automatically. They must elect this benefit. For more information, read Medicare (Publication No. 05-10043).

If you have a Health Savings Account (HSA)

If you have an HSA when you sign up for Medicare, you can't contribute to your HSA once your Medicare coverage begins. If you contribute to your HSA after your Medicare coverage starts, you may have to pay a tax penalty. If you'd like to continue contributing to your HSA, you shouldn't apply for Medicare, Social Security, or Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) benefits.

NOTE: *Premium-free Part A coverage begins six months before the date you apply for Medicare (or Social Security/RRB benefits), but no earlier than the first month you were eligible for Medicare. To avoid a tax penalty, you should stop contributing to your HSA at least six months before you apply for Medicare.*

“Extra Help” with Medicare prescription drug costs

If you have limited resources and income, you may qualify for Extra Help to pay for your prescription drugs under Medicare Part D. Social Security's role is to help you understand how you may qualify and to process your application for Extra Help. To see if you qualify or to apply, call Social Security's toll-free number or visit www.ssa.gov/extrahelp.

Help with other Medicare costs

If you have limited income and few resources, your state may pay your Medicare premiums and, in some cases, other “out-of-pocket” medical expenses, such as deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance.

Only your state can decide whether you qualify for help under this program. If you think you qualify, contact your Medicaid, social services, or health and human services office. Visit [**Medicare.gov/contacts**](https://www.medicare.gov/contacts) or call **1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)**; TTY: **1-877-486-2048**) to get their number.

Some facts about Social Security

2021 Social Security taxes

- You pay 6.2 percent and your employer pays 6.2 percent.
- If you’re self-employed, you pay 12.4 percent.
- You don’t pay Social Security taxes on earnings greater than \$142,800.

2021 Medicare taxes

- You and your employer each pay 1.45 percent.
- If you’re self-employed, you pay 2.9 percent.
- Medicare taxes are paid on all of your earnings; there is no limit.
- There are additional Medicare taxes for higher-income workers.

Work credits in 2021

- For each \$1,470 you earn, you receive one Social Security “credit,” up to four per year.
- Most people need 40 credits to be eligible for retirement benefits.

- Younger people need fewer credits to qualify for disability benefits or for their family members to be eligible for survivors benefits.

Estimated average 2021 monthly Social Security benefits

- All retired workers: \$1,543
- Retired worker with only an aged spouse: \$2,596
- All disabled workers: \$1,277
- Disabled worker with a young spouse and one or more children: \$2,224
- All aged widows and widowers: \$1,453
- Young widow or widower with two children: \$3,001

2021 monthly federal SSI maximum payment rates

(Doesn't include state supplement, if any)

- \$794 for an individual
- \$1,191 for a couple

Contacting Social Security

There are several ways to contact us, such as online, by phone, and in person. We're here to answer your questions and to serve you. For more than 85 years, Social Security has helped secure today and tomorrow by providing benefits and financial protection for millions of people throughout their life's journey.

Visit our website

The most convenient way to conduct Social Security business from anywhere is online at **www.ssa.gov**. You can:

- Apply for Extra Help with Medicare prescription drug plan costs.
- Apply for most types of benefits.

-
- Find copies of our publications.
 - Get answers to frequently asked questions.

When you create a personal *my* Social Security account, you can do even more.

- Review your *Social Security Statement*.
- Verify your earnings.
- Get estimates of future benefits.
- Print a benefit verification letter.
- Change your direct deposit information.
- Request a replacement Medicare card.
- Get a replacement SSA-1099/1042S.
- Request a replacement Social Security card, if you have no changes and your state participates.

Call us

If you don't have access to the internet, we offer many automated services by telephone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**, if you're deaf or hard of hearing.

A member of our staff can answer your call from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday, if you need to speak with someone. We ask for your patience during busy periods since you may experience a high rate of busy signals and longer hold times to speak to us. We look forward to serving you.

Schedule an office visit

You can find the closest office location by entering your ZIP code on our office locator webpage.

If you are bringing documents for us to see, remember that they must be original or certified copies that are certified by the issuing agency.

Notes

Notes

Notes



Securing today
and tomorrow

Social Security Administration | Publication No. 05-10024
ICN 454930 | Unit of Issue — Package of 25
May 2021 (January 2021 editions may be used)
Understanding the Benefits
Produced and published at U.S. taxpayer expense