

Social Security 2026 Benefits

Client Reference Guide

Data sourced from the Social Security Administration,
Internal Revenue Service, and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Calculating Social Security Benefits

Work Requirements

40 — The number of quarters (credits) of work needed to be eligible for full Social Security retirement benefits.

35 — Social Security averages the 35 highest years of earnings. Years with no earnings may be counted as "zero years" to bring the total to 35.

Quarter of Coverage

	2025	2026
Earnings needed for one SS credit	\$1,810	\$1,890

Maximum Taxable Earnings

	2025	2026
Social Security (OASDI)	\$176,100	\$184,500
Medicare (HI only)	No Limit	No Limit

Maximum Social Security Benefit

	2025	2026
Worker retiring at FRA	\$4,018/mo.	\$4,152/mo.

Estimated Average Monthly Benefits (January 2026)

Estimated Benefit	2026
All Retired Workers	\$2,071
Aged Couple, Both Receiving Benefits	\$3,208
Aged Widow(er) Alone	\$1,919

Social Security and Medicare Tax Withholdings

Tax Rate	Social Security	Medicare	Total
Employee	6.20%	1.45%	7.65%
Self-Employed	6.20%	1.45%	7.65%
Total	12.40%	2.90%	15.30%

The Social Security portion is taxable up to the maximum taxable earnings amount. The Medicare portion (HI) is 1.45% on all earnings. An additional 0.9% Medicare tax applies to individuals with earned income over \$200,000 (\$250,000 MFJ; \$125,000 MFS).

Social Security Taxes and Reductions

Reduction in Benefits if Taking SS Early and Working

Age	Amount of Reduction	2026 Max Earned Income
62 through year of attaining	Lose \$1 for every \$2 earned above limit	\$24,480 (\$2,040/mo.)
Year of attaining FRA	Lose \$1 for every \$3 earned above limit	\$65,160 (\$5,430/mo.)

Taxation of Social Security Benefits

	Up to 50% Taxable	Up to 85% Taxable
Single	\$25,000–\$34,000	\$34,001 or more
Married, filing jointly	\$32,000–\$44,000	\$44,001 or more

These thresholds were set in 1984 and have not been indexed for inflation.

Calculating Taxable Portion of Benefits



What Is Excluded from Combined Income?

- » Roth IRA Distributions
- » Non-Taxable Pensions and Annuities
- » Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs)
- » Inheritance / Gifts
- » Life Insurance Proceeds
- » Qualified Medical Distributions from HSAs

Claiming Before or After Full Retirement Age

Full Retirement Age for Retired Workers

Year of Birth	FRA	Age 62 Benefit
1943–1954	66	75.0%
1955	66 and 2 months	74.2%
1956	66 and 4 months	73.3%
1957	66 and 6 months	72.5%
1958	66 and 8 months	71.7%
1959	66 and 10 months	70.8%
1960 and later	67	70.0%

Benefit Reductions and Increases (FRA 67)

For those born 1960 or later (FRA = 67):

Claiming Age	Change from FRA Benefit
62	-30%
63	-25%
64	-20%
65	-13.3%
66	-6.7%
67 (FRA)	0% (full benefit)
68	+8%
69	+16%
70	+24%

Delayed retirement credits accrue at 8% per year (2/3 of 1% per month) beyond FRA until age 70. There is no benefit to delaying past age 70.

Options Before or After Full Retirement Age

Summary of Retirement, Spousal and Survivor Benefits

	Claim Before FRA	Claim At or After FRA
SS Retirement Benefits	Benefits permanently reduced	Benefits are increased
Working and Collecting SS	Benefits reduced by \$1 for every \$2 over \$24,480	Earn unlimited and collect SS
Spousal Benefits	Spousal benefits are reduced	Maximum spousal benefit at FRA
Survivor Benefits	Reduced if widow claims before FRA and/or deceased claimed before FRA	Maximum if widow claims at/after FRA and deceased claimed at/after FRA
Divorcee Benefits	Never worked: reduced spousal; Worked: greater of reduced ex-spousal or reduced personal	Never worked: max spousal; Worked: greater of ex-spousal or personal

¹ If attaining full retirement age in 2026, reduction is \$1 for every \$3 of earned income over \$65,160 (\$5,430/mo.).

Spousal Benefits

Payment Period	Maximum Benefit	Partial Benefit
While primary worker is alive and collecting	Spouse must be FRA; max is 50% of worker's FRA benefit; does not increase after FRA	Spouse must be 62+; receives 32.5%–49.9% of worker's FRA benefit; reduction is permanent

Widow and Survivor Benefits

Benefit if Deceased Claimed At or After FRA

	Maximum Benefit	Partial Benefit
Widow Age	FRA	60 to FRA
Amount	100% of deceased's benefit (incl. delayed credits)	71–99% of deceased's benefit

Benefit if Deceased Did Not Claim Social Security

Situation	Benefit Percentage
Deceased passed away BEFORE FRA	Widow % is based on deceased's FRA benefit
Deceased passed away AT or AFTER FRA	Widow % based on deceased's FRA benefit plus any step-ups entitled to on date of death

Widow Classifications — Eligibility

	Aged Widow	Child-in-Care Widow	Disabled Widow
Basic	Age 60+; worker fully insured	Has child <16 or disabled; worker	Ages 50–59 and disabled; worker
Unmarried	Unmarried or remarried after 60	Unmarried	Unmarried or remarried after 50
Divorced	Marriage ≥10 years	No requirement	Marriage ≥10 years
Max Benefit	100% of PIA	75% of PIA	71.5% of PIA

Switch-Up Strategies for Aged Widows

Option 1: Reduced Widow to Full Personal	Option 2: Reduced Personal to Full Widow
Age 60: Start with reduced widow benefit	Age 62: Start with reduced personal benefit
Age 62+: Switch to personal benefit	At FRA: Switch to full widow benefit

Divorcee Benefits

Divorce Eligibility Requirements

Requirement	Details
Length of Marriage	At least ten years
Years Since Divorce	At least two years to receive spousal benefit if ex-spouse has not applied
If You Remarry	Generally forfeit the benefit of the ex-spouse (see below)
If Ex-Spouse Remarries	You remain entitled to benefit off ex-spouse

Options if You Remarry

	Remarry Before 60 (50 if Disabled)	Remarry After 60 (50 if Disabled)
Spousal Benefit on Ex	Typically forfeited	Typically forfeited
Survivor Benefit on Ex	Typically forfeited	Keep

- If the second marriage ends, you may again become entitled to benefits based on first marriage.
- Cannot claim benefits on two ex-spouses at the same time.

Spousal Claiming: Divorced vs. Married Couples

	Divorced Couples	Married Couples
Max # of Spousal Benefits	Both ex-spouses may receive simultaneously (must be 62+ and divorced 2+ years)	Only one spouse at a time
Requirements	Ex-spouse does not need to have applied for personal benefit	Primary worker must have applied and be collecting
Both Worked	Receive your personal benefit first; if ex-spousal is higher, receive additional amount	Receive your personal benefit first; if spousal is higher, receive additional amount

Government Pensions & Benefit Calculation

WEP and GPO: Repealed

The Social Security Fairness Act, signed into law on January 5, 2025, repealed both the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO), effective for benefits payable after December 2023.

Previously, the WEP reduced Social Security benefits for workers who split their careers between Social Security-covered and non-covered employment (e.g., certain government jobs). The GPO reduced spousal and widow benefits for individuals receiving a government pension from non-covered work. These provisions affected over 3.2 million people, including many teachers, firefighters, police officers, and federal employees under CSRS.

If you previously had benefits reduced or eliminated by WEP or GPO, SSA has completed retroactive payments and adjusted monthly benefits. Contact SSA if you believe you are owed an adjustment.

Primary Insurance Amount (PIA) and Bend Points

The PIA is the benefit you receive if you begin collecting at FRA. It is calculated from your Average Indexed Monthly Earnings (AIME) using a progressive formula.

For workers first eligible in 2026, the bend points are:

- (a) 90% of the first \$1,286 of AIME, plus
- (b) 32% of AIME over \$1,286 through \$7,749, plus
- (c) 15% of AIME over \$7,749

Federal Government Pension Plans

	CSRS	CSRS Offset	FERS
Hire Date	Before Jan 1, 1984	Rehired after break >1 yr with 5+ yrs creditable service	On or after 1/1/1984; or transferred from CSRS
Pays into Social Security?	No	Yes (with offset at retirement)	Yes
Coordination with SS	N/A	CSRS benefit offset by SS benefit at age 62	FERS supplement until age 62; then SS benefit begins

Medicare

Medicare Taxes on Earnings

Earnings Threshold	Employee	Self-Employed	Total
Below \$200K single / \$250K joint / \$125K MFS	1.45%	1.45%	2.90%
Above \$200K single / \$250K joint / \$125K MFS	2.35%	1.45%	3.80%

Net Investment Income Tax (NIIT)

3.8% tax on lesser of net investment income or MAGI in excess of: Single >\$200,000; MFJ >\$250,000; MFS >\$125,000.

Medicare and Other Provisions

Combination	Guidelines
Medicare and HSAs	Cannot contribute to HSAs once you have Medicare
Medicare and Social Security	If collecting SS, you cannot decline Part A after age 65
Hold Harmless Provision	Part B premium increases will not reduce SS benefits for most beneficiaries

Medicare Part A Premiums (2026)

Quarters of Medicare-Covered Employment	Monthly Part A Premium
40 or more	None (premium-free)
30 to 39 quarters	\$311.00
Fewer than 30 quarters	\$565.00

Part A inpatient hospital deductible: \$1,736 (2026).

Medicare Premiums (2026)

Part B + D Income-Related Monthly Adjustment (IRMAA)

Premiums based on MAGI from 2024 tax return. Standard Part B premium: \$202.90/mo. Part B deductible: \$283/yr.

Individual Tax Return (2024 Income)	Joint Tax Return (2024 Income)	2026 Part B Monthly Premium	2026 Part D Monthly IRMAA
\$109,000 or less	\$218,000 or less	\$202.90	Plan Premium
\$109,001–\$137,000	\$218,001–\$274,000	\$284.10	\$14.50 + Plan
\$137,001–\$171,000	\$274,001–\$342,000	\$405.80	\$37.50 + Plan
\$171,001–\$205,000	\$342,001–\$410,000	\$527.50	\$60.40 + Plan
\$205,001–\$499,999	\$410,001–\$749,999	\$649.20	\$83.30 + Plan
\$500,000 and above	\$750,000 and above	\$689.90	\$91.00 + Plan

Married Filing Separately (but living together):

2024 Income (MFS)	2026 Part B Premium	2026 Part D IRMAA
\$109,000 or less	\$202.90	Plan Premium
Above \$109,000 and less than \$391,000	\$649.20	\$83.30 + Plan
\$391,000 and above	\$689.90	\$91.00 + Plan

Note: MFS filers who lived with their spouse have only three brackets—there are no intermediate tiers. Income just \$1 over \$109,000 triggers a jump from \$202.90 to \$649.20/mo. in Part B premiums.

IRMAA is recalculated annually. If you experience a life-changing event (retirement, divorce, death of spouse), you may request that SSA use a more recent tax year by filing Form SSA-44.

Important Ages and Milestones

Retirement Milestones

Age	Milestone
50	Catch-up contributions for IRAs, 401(k), 403(b)
55	Penalty-free distribution from 401(k) after separation from service
59½	Penalty-free distributions from Traditional IRAs and qualified retirement plans
60	Surviving spouse eligible for partial SS survivor benefits
62	Primary worker eligible for reduced SS; spouse eligible for reduced spousal benefits
65	Enroll in Medicare; penalty-free non-medical HSA withdrawals (still taxable)
66–67	Full Retirement Age (depends on birth year; 67 for those born 1960+)
70	Maximum delayed retirement credits; no benefit to waiting past 70
73	Required Minimum Distributions from Traditional IRAs and certain retirement plans (SECURE 2.0)

Children's Benefits

Situation	Children's Benefit
Parent alive and collecting	Up to 50% of retirement or disability benefit
Parent is deceased	Up to 75% of deceased parent's basic SS benefit
Family limit	Generally 150% to 180% of the retirement or disability benefit

Children must be: biological, adopted, stepchild, or dependent grandchild; unmarried; and under 18 (or 18–19 and a full-time student through grade 12, or 18+ and disabled with onset before age 22).

Disability Benefits and Miscellaneous

Social Security Disability Thresholds (2026)

	2025	2026
Substantial Gainful Activity (Non-Blind)	\$1,620/mo.	\$1,690/mo.
Substantial Gainful Activity (Blind)	\$2,700/mo.	\$2,830/mo.
Trial Work Period	\$1,160/mo.	\$1,210/mo.

Duration of Work Test for Disability

If disabled at...	Work generally needed
Before Age 28	1.5 years
Age 30	2 years
Age 38	4 years
Age 42	5 years
Age 50	7 years
Age 60	9.5 years

Marriage Requirements for Benefits

Type of Benefit	Length of Marriage	Amount
Spousal	1 continuous year or parent of child	32.5%–50% of worker's FRA benefit
Retired Widow	Generally 9+ months; not remarried before 60 (50 if	71.5%–100% of deceased's FRA benefit
Divorcee (Spousal/Widow)	At least ten years	See spousal and widow rules
Child-in-Care Widow	No length requirement	75% of deceased's benefit (family max applies)

This guide is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute tax, legal, or financial advice. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, rules, thresholds, and benefit amounts are subject to change. Readers should verify all figures with the official sources—the Social Security Administration ([ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)), the Internal Revenue Service (irs.gov), and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (medicare.gov)—and consult a qualified tax, legal, or financial professional before making decisions based on this information. Figures are based on SSA, IRS, and CMS amounts published for the 2026 calendar year; refer to those agencies for the most current information.