



# Social Security

## How You Earn Credits

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[www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov)

# How You Earn Credits

You qualify for Social Security benefits by earning Social Security credits when you work in a job and pay Social Security taxes.

The credits are based on the amount of your earnings. We use your work history to determine your eligibility for retirement or disability benefits or your family's eligibility for survivors benefits when you die.

In 2009, you receive one credit for each \$1,090 of earnings, up to the maximum of four credits per year.

Each year the amount of earnings needed for credits goes up slightly as average earnings levels increase. The credits you earn remain on your Social Security record even if you change jobs or have no earnings for a while.

## Special rules for some jobs

Special rules for earning Social Security coverage apply to certain types of work.

If you are self-employed, you earn Social Security credits the same way employees do (one credit for each \$1,090 in net earnings, but no more than four credits per year). Special rules apply if you have net annual earnings of less than \$400. For more information, ask for *If You Are Self-Employed* (Publication No. 05-10022).

If you are in the military, you earn Social Security credits the same way civilian employees do. You also may get additional earnings credits under certain conditions. For more information, ask for *Military Service And Social Security* (Publication No. 05-10017).

We also have special rules about how you earn credits for other kinds of work. Some of these jobs are—

- Domestic work;
- Farm work; or
- Work for a church or church-controlled organization that does not pay Social Security taxes.

Call us if you have a question about how you earn credits in your job.

## How long you must work to qualify for Social Security

The number of credits you need to be eligible for benefits depends on your age and the type of benefit.

### Retirement benefits

Anyone born in 1929 or later needs 10 years of work (40 credits) to be eligible for retirement benefits. People born before 1929 need fewer years of work.

### Disability benefits

How many credits you need for disability benefits depends on how old you are when you become disabled.

- If you become disabled before age 24, you generally need 1½ years of work (six credits) in the three years before you became disabled.
- If you are 24 through 30, you generally need credits for half of the time between age 21 and the time you became disabled.
- If you are disabled at age 31 or older, you generally need at least 20 credits in the 10 years immediately before you became disabled. The following table shows examples of how many credits you would need if you became disabled at various selected ages. This table does not cover all situations.

Disabled at age	Credits needed	Years of work
31 through 42	20	5
44	22	5 ½
46	24	6
48	26	6 ½
50	28	7
52	30	7 ½
54	32	8
56	34	8 ½
58	36	9
60	38	9 ½
62 or older	40	10

## Survivors benefits

When a person who has worked and paid Social Security taxes dies, certain members of the family may be eligible for survivors benefits. Up to 10 years of work is needed to be eligible for benefits, depending on the person's age at the time of death. Survivors of very young workers may be eligible if the deceased worker was employed for 1½ years during the three years before his or her death.

Social Security survivors benefits can be paid to:

- A widow or widower—full benefits at full retirement age, or reduced benefits as early as age 60.

- A disabled widow or widower—as early as age 50.
- A widow or widower of any age who takes care of the deceased's child who is younger than age 16 or disabled, and receiving Social Security benefits.
- Divorced spouses under certain conditions.
- Unmarried children under 18, or up to age 19 if they attend elementary or secondary school full time. Under certain circumstances, benefits can be paid to stepchildren, grandchildren or adopted children.
- Children who were disabled before age 22 and remain disabled.
- Dependent parents age 62 or older.

Contact us if you need more information about your family's situation.

## **Medicare**

The Social Security credits you earn also count toward eligibility for Medicare when you reach age 65. You may be eligible for Medicare at an earlier age if you get disability benefits for 24 months or more. Those who have permanent kidney failure or get disability benefits because of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease) do not have to wait 24 months to receive Medicare coverage. Your dependents or survivors also may be eligible for Medicare at age 65 or earlier if they are disabled. People who have permanent kidney failure and need kidney dialysis or a kidney transplant may be eligible for Medicare at any age

based on a spouse's or parent's earnings as well as their own. If you would like to have more information about Medicare, contact us and ask for *Medicare* (Publication No. 05-10043).

## **Not every kind of work counts toward Social Security benefits**

Not all employees work in jobs covered by Social Security. Some of these employees are—

- Most federal employees hired before 1984 (since January 1, 1983, all federal employees have paid the Medicare hospital insurance part of the Social Security tax);
- Railroad employees with more than 10 years of service;
- Employees of some state and local governments that chose not to participate in Social Security; or
- Children younger than age 21 who do household chores for a parent (except a child age 18 or older who works in the parent's business).

## **Make sure your records are accurate**

Each year your employer sends a copy of your W-2 (*Wage and Tax Statement*) to Social Security. Social Security compares your name and Social Security number on the W-2 with our records. When we find your name and number, your earnings shown on the W-2 are recorded on your lifelong earnings record. Your lifelong earnings

record is what we use to figure whether you can get future benefits and the benefit amount.

It is critical that your name and Social Security number on your Social Security card agree with your employer's payroll records and W-2. If they do not agree, your employer may get a letter from Social Security. This letter does not mean that your employer should change your job, lay you off, fire you or take other action against you. You need to correct the error. It is up to you to make sure both records are correct. If your Social Security card is not correct, contact any Social Security office. Tell your employer if your name and Social Security number are incorrect on the employer's record.

## Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or call toll-free **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We can provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.



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