

The Appeals Process



Social Security wants to be sure that every decision made about your disability or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) application is correct. We carefully consider all the information in your case before we make any decisions that affect your eligibility or your benefit amount.

When we make a decision on your claim, we will send you a letter explaining our decision. If you do not agree with our decision, you can appeal—that is, ask us to look at your case again.

When you ask for an appeal, we will look at the entire decision, even those parts that were in your favor. If our decision was wrong, we will change it.

When and how can I appeal?

If you applied for Social Security disability benefits and your claim was denied, the fastest and easiest way to file an appeal of your decision is by visiting www.socialsecurity.gov/disability/appeal. You can upload documents online to support your appeal, which will help decrease the time it takes to receive a decision from Social Security.

If you live outside of the United States, you can also appeal your Social Security disability decision online.

If your SSI application was denied or if you wish to send a written appeal form, you must make your request within 60 days from the date you receive our letter. We assume you receive the letter five days after the date on the letter, unless you can show us you received it later. Call your local Social Security office if you need help with your appeal.

How many appeal levels are there?

Generally, there are four levels of appeal. They are:

- Reconsideration;
- Hearing by an administrative law judge;
- Review by the Appeals Council; and
- Federal Court review.

When we send you a letter about a decision on your application, we will tell you how to appeal the decision.

Reconsideration

A reconsideration is a complete review of your claim by someone who did not take part in the first decision. We will look at all the evidence submitted when the original decision was made, plus any new evidence.

Most reconsiderations involve a review of your files without the need for you to be present. But when you appeal a decision that you are no longer eligible for disability benefits because your medical condition has improved, you can meet with a Social Security representative and explain why you believe you still have a disability.

Hearing

If you disagree with the reconsideration decision, you may ask for a hearing. The hearing will be conducted by an administrative law judge who had no part in the original decision or the reconsideration of your case. The hearing is usually held within 75 miles of your home. The administrative law judge will notify you of the time and place of the hearing.

Before the hearing, we may ask you to give us more evidence and to clarify information about your claim. You may look at the information in your file and give new information.

At the hearing, the administrative law judge will question you and any witnesses you bring. Other witnesses, such as medical or vocational experts, also may give us information at the hearing. You or your representative may question the witnesses.

In certain situations, we may hold your hearing by a video conference rather than in person. We will let you know ahead of time if this is the case. With video hearings, we can make the hearing more convenient for you. Often an appearance by video hearing can be scheduled faster than an in-person appearance. Also, a video hearing location may be closer to your home. That might make it easier for you to have witnesses or other people accompany you.

It is usually to your advantage to attend the hearing (in person or video conference). You and your representative, if you have one, should come to the hearing and explain your case.

(over)

If you are unable to attend a hearing or do not wish to do so, you must tell us why in writing as soon as you can. Unless the administrative law judge believes your presence is necessary to decide your case and requires you to attend, you will not have to go. Or we may be able to make other arrangements for you, such as changing the time or place of your hearing. You have to have a good reason for us to make other arrangements.

After the hearing, the judge will make a decision based on all the information in your case, including any new information you give. We will send you a letter and a copy of the judge's decision.

Appeals Council

If you disagree with the hearing decision, you may ask for a review by Social Security's Appeals Council. We will be glad to help you ask for this review.

The Appeals Council looks at all requests for review, but it may deny a request if it believes the hearing decision was correct. If the Appeals Council decides to review your case, it will either decide your case itself or return it to an administrative law judge for further review.

If the Appeals Council denies your request for review, we will send you a letter explaining the denial. If the Appeals Council reviews your case and makes a decision itself, we will send you a copy of the decision. If the Appeals Council returns your case to an administrative law judge, we will send you a letter and a copy of the order.

Federal Court

If you disagree with the Appeals Council's decision or if the Appeals Council decides not to review your case, you may file a lawsuit in a federal district court. The letter we send you about the Appeals Council's action also will tell you how to ask a court to look at your case.

Will my benefits continue?

In some cases, you may ask us to continue paying your benefits while we make a decision on your appeal. You can ask for your benefits to continue when:

- You are appealing our decision that you can no longer get Social Security disability

benefits because your medical condition is not disabling; or

- You are appealing our decision that you are no longer eligible for SSI payments or that your SSI payment should be reduced or suspended.

If you want your benefits to continue, you must tell us within 10 days of the date you receive our letter. If your appeal is turned down, you may have to pay back any money you were not eligible to receive.

Can someone help me?

Yes. Many people handle their own Social Security appeals with free help from Social Security. But you can choose a lawyer, a friend or someone else to help you. Someone you appoint to help you is called your "representative." We will work with your representative just as we would work with you. Your representative can act for you in most Social Security matters and will receive a copy of any decisions we make about your application.

Your representative cannot charge or collect a fee from you without first getting written approval from Social Security. If you want more information about having a representative, ask for *Your Right To Representation* (Publication No. 05-10075) or you can find it on our website.

Contacting Social Security

Visit www.socialsecurity.gov anytime to apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, www.socialsecurity.gov, is available to you anytime and anywhere!



Social Security Administration
SSA Publication No. 05-10041
ICN 459260
Unit of Issue - HD (one hundred)
March 2015 (Destroy prior editions)