

## **APPLYING FOR SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS**

Are you getting close to your retirement age? If so, you probably already have a date set for when you want to start receiving benefits. With that being the case, you might want to find out how the application process works and when you need to apply in order to start receiving benefits at your designated retirement date. The following information provides you with the information that you will need to gather and when to fill out the application to receive benefits.

### **How do I apply for benefits?**

- On-line at the Social Security Administration's website. This process should take no more than 30 minutes as long as you've gathered all of the required information and documentation;
- By phone; and
- At your local Social Security office if you feel more comfortable having someone in their office to assist you with the application process.

Whatever method you choose to apply, your application will be reviewed and processed as soon as all necessary documentation and information is received. Also, the Social Security Administration will notify you if it turns out you could qualify for higher benefits on your spouse's record, or if other family members can receive benefits on your work record.

### **When should I apply?**

The earliest you can apply is when you are at least 61 years and 9 months old. If you apply then, you won't begin receiving benefits until you turn 62. Once you've reached the minimum age of eligibility at the age of 62, you should be able to apply and start your benefits in the same month. There is no need to rush and apply early unless you know there will be delays with documentation or you have other special circumstances. In general, the Social Security Administration says that you should apply for benefits no more than four months before the date you want your benefits to start.

### **When are benefits paid?**

Social Security benefits are paid in the month after they are due. If you start your benefits on your 62nd birthday, you won't start receiving payments until the following month.

### **Should I apply when I reach 62 years of age?**

If you don't need your Social Security benefits right way, consider delaying your retirement date and the application process in order to increase your monthly payment down the road.

You should also know that even if you decide to wait to claim benefits past the age of 62, you should still fill out the benefit application just to apply for Medicare three (3) months before you turn 65 years of age. As long as you have earned enough Social Security credits (which are available on your Social Security statement), you are eligible for Medicare whether or not you are ready to begin receiving your retirement benefits. Delaying your application for Medicare can result in higher premiums, so it's important to do it as soon as possible.

### **What information will I need to apply for benefits?**

In order to apply for Social Security benefits, you'll need to be able to document some information about your identity and work history. Before applying, you should have the following information available:

- Your date and place of birth (which you need to document with an original birth certificate);
- Your Social Security number;
- Your spouse's Social Security number and date of birth;
- Your place of marriage;
- The date of divorce or death of your spouse, if applicable;
- The names of your unmarried children under 18 (or 18-19 if still in high school), and disabled children under 22;
- Your bank account information if you want your benefits directly deposited;
- The name and address of your employers from this and last year;
- The amount of money you earned last year, this year, and your estimated earnings next year (if any);
- A copy of last year's W-2 or self-employment tax return;
- Your earnings record (a copy of your Social Security statement has this information); and
- Records of any active duty military service before 1968 (documented with a copy of your military service papers).

If you use the online or phone application, you'll be given a list of required documents, as well as instructions on how to submit them.

If there are any special circumstances, it may require additional documentation. A more complete list of the required documentation can be found on the Social Security Administration's website.

### **Are there any other things I need to know?**

The information provided here is only to give you the information on how to apply for Social Security benefits. There are several other things you might want to consider before applying, such as the impact of applying early or late and whether or not you might benefit from using certain Social Security strategies.

For more information, please visit the Social Security Administration's web site.