# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **What are Social Security retirement benefits, and when can people access them?**

**Answer**:

Social Security retirement benefits are monthly payments provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to individuals who have worked and paid Social Security taxes during their employment. Social Security retirement benefits are based on age and work history, not disability. Individuals can start receiving early retirement benefits at age 62, which results in a reduced monthly amount. The full retirement age depends on birth year—for example, for those born after 1960, it is 67. Retirement benefits are funded through FICA taxes paid while working. Each year, closer to full retirement age increases the benefit amount, up to the full benefit at retirement age.

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2. **What happens to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits when someone reaches full retirement age?**

**Answer**:

When individuals receiving SSDI reach full retirement age, their SSDI benefits automatically convert to Social Security retirement benefits. The amount remains the same, as SSDI payments are already calculated as if the recipient were at full retirement age.

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**3. What happens if I retire early at 62? How does working impact early retirement benefits?**

There is an annual earnings limit for individuals who retire early and begin receiving Social Security benefits before reaching full retirement age. For every $2 earned above this limit, $1 is deducted from your Social Security benefits. However, once you reach full retirement age, there are no earnings limits, and you can work and earn any amount without reductions to your Social Security benefits.

**4. What does "qualified alien" mean in relation to Social Security benefits?**

**Answer**:

A "qualified alien" refers to individuals with specific immigration statuses as determined by the Department of Homeland Security. This includes legal permanent residents (Green Card holders) and other categories (like Refugees, Certain Victims of Trafficking) who meet the SSA's criteria for eligibility.

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**5. If I am on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), can I work?**

**SSI**: Yes, you are encouraged to work while receiving SSI benefits. The Social Security Administration has a formula to determine how much of your earned income affects your SSI payment. Specifically, the first $65 of your wages (or $85 if you have no other income) are excluded, and only half of your remaining earnings are counted toward reducing your SSI benefit. For example, if you earn $500 in wages during a month:

- Subtract the $65 exclusion: $500 - $65 = $435.
- Divide the remaining amount in half: $435 ÷ 2 = $217.50.

This $217.50 is deducted from your SSI payment, but you keep the rest of your earnings. This means that working will always increase your total income, as you keep part of your earnings along with your adjusted SSI payment.

**SSDI**: You can work without losing benefits for up to nine months, regardless of your income. After that, your benefits may stop if you earn over $1,550 per month (2024 threshold). If you earn less than $1,550, you can continue receiving SSDI. If you stop working within five years, you can quickly restart your SSDI benefits without reapplying. If you are on SSDI, Medicare coverage continues for at least 8.5 years while you work.

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6. **What are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility requirements for people 65 and older?**

SNAP is a federal assistance program that provides low-income individuals and families with financial support to purchase nutritious food. For individuals 65 and older:

- They must have been legal permanent residents (Green Card holders) for at least 5 years.
- Income limits apply. As of October 2024:
  - For a single-person household: $2,071/month (165% FPL)
  - For a two-person household: $2,811/month
- Asset limits as per 2024 are:
  - $2,000 for a single person
  - $3,000 for a couple

· SNAP can be applied individually, as a couple, or as a family unit if living with children or grandchildren.

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7. **How is SNAP income eligibility determined for multi-generational households?**

**Answer**:

For SNAP eligibility, individuals living with children or grandchildren are generally considered a single "SNAP unit," meaning their combined household income is assessed. However, if individuals or couples living together prepare meals separately, they can apply individually. Income and asset limits must still be met for approval.

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**8. If I am about to retire and my employer offers 18 months of COBRA coverage, can I delay signing up for Medicare until COBRA runs out?**

It is generally not advisable to delay enrolling in Medicare when you turn 65. COBRA is not considered primary coverage once you turn 65, and Medicare pays first. Delaying Medicare Part B can result in penalties, coverage gaps, or denied claims. Additionally, COBRA is costly because employers no longer subsidize premiums. Enrolling in Medicare (Parts A, B, and D) and using COBRA as supplementary coverage if needed is recommended. Always consult HR/benefits coordinators, SHIP counselors, or Social Security for guidance to avoid complications.

**9. What happens if I want to continue working after turning 65 and have a high-deductible health plan with a Health Savings Account (HSA)?**

If you have a high-deductible health plan with an HSA, contributions to the HSA must stop once you enroll in Medicare because those contributions are made with pre-tax dollars. At 65, you can still use your existing HSA funds for Medicare-related expenses, such as premiums, deductibles, and copays. It's often better to sign up for Medicare and stop HSA contributions, especially if your employer provides other health coverage options.

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**10. Can I continue working after 65 and delay Medicare enrollment if I have employer-sponsored health insurance?**

Yes, if your employer has 20 or more employees and offers creditable group health insurance, you can delay enrolling in Medicare Part B without penalty. You can sign up for Medicare Part A (premium-free) while keeping your employer insurance. However, if you are on multiple medications or have high prescription costs, evaluate whether your employer plan's drug coverage is adequate. If not, consider enrolling in a Medicare Part D plan for prescription drugs. Once you or your spouse stops working, you have a six-month **Special Enrollment Period (SEP)** to sign up for Part B and an additional 63 days for Part D.

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**11. Do I have to enroll in Medicare if I have health coverage after 65 through my spouse's employer?**

If you or your spouse are actively working and have employer-sponsored health insurance (from a company with 20+ employees), you can delay enrolling in Medicare without penalties. After you or your spouse stop working, you have a six-month **Special Enrollment Period** to enroll in Medicare Part B and 63 days to sign up for Part D. Be aware that the employee's insurance coverage may differ for spouses, so verify details with your benefits coordinator.

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12. **Can Green Card holders aged 65 or older qualify for Medicare?**
Green Card holders who have worked and paid Medicare taxes for 40 quarters are eligible. If they haven't worked enough, they can purchase Medicare after five years of residency, but it is expensive. If they stop paying premiums while abroad, they may incur penalties upon return.

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**13. Who are SHIP counselors, and how can seniors access them?**

SHIP (State Health Insurance Assistance Program) counselors provide free, unbiased, one-on-one Medicare counseling. They can help with supplemental policies, drug plans, and Medicare Advantage options. To find a SHIP counselor, visit shiphelp.org visit shiphelp.org and use the "Find Local Medicare Help" tool. SHIP services are available in all U.S. states, territories, and Puerto Rico**.**

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**14. What happens to my Medicare if I am already drawing early Social Security benefits?**
If you are drawing Social Security at 62, Medicare will automatically enroll you in Part A and Part B when you turn 65. If you continue working and have employer coverage, notify Social Security to delay Part B enrollment to avoid unnecessary premiums.

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15. **What is the best Medicare option for people traveling to different states?**
Original Medicare (Parts A and B) is a good option because it has no network restrictions, so you can receive care from doctors across states who accept Medicare. However, Medicare Advantage (Part C) plans are limited to specific ZIP codes and states, so traveling out of state may leave you out of network and without coverage except in emergencies.

16. **Can you retain public benefits, such as Medicare, if you travel out of the country?**
No, Medicare does not work outside the U.S. If you plan to travel, you should inform your state

Department of Human Services (DHS). Benefits like Medicaid and SNAP are paused if you are out of the U.S. for more than 60 days, and you may need to reapply when you return.

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17. **What happens to Social Security benefits if you travel abroad?**
Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Social Security Retirement benefits can be received outside the U.S. However, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) cannot be received if you are outside the country for a full calendar month.

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18. **Should I keep paying Medicare premiums if I live abroad part of the year?**
It depends. Medicare Part B does not work outside the U.S., but you may face penalties if you disenroll and later return. Weigh the cost of paying premiums while abroad against the penalty for reenrollment.

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19. **What will happen to SNAP benefits if I travel abroad?**
SNAP benefits must be paused while you are outside the U.S. You need to notify DHS of your travel dates. If you are gone for over 60 days, SNAP may be canceled, and you will need to reapply.

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20. **What happens to Medicaid and Community Care Program (CCP) benefits if I travel abroad?**
Medicaid and CCP benefits are paused after one month of being out of the country. If you are gone longer, they may be canceled, and you would need to reapply upon returning.

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21. **What should people consider when traveling back and forth between countries while on Medicare?**

If you frequently travel abroad but plan to return to the U.S., you should continue paying your Medicare Part B premiums to avoid penalties. Disenrolling from Medicare can make re-enrollment difficult and expensive.