I Receive Benefits Based on Disability—What Happens if I Start Working?

Supplemental Security Income [SSI]

The amount of SSI you get is based on the amount of income you receive. Generally, when you begin to receive other income, your SSI benefits go down, according to a formula. When your income goes over a certain amount, your SSI benefits will stop until your income goes back down. You must tell the Social Security office immediately when your income goes up or down.

Social Security will look at your monthly income to decide how much your SSI payment will be. The first $85.00 you earn will be deducted from your gross monthly earnings. (Your gross monthly income is the amount you make before taxes and other deductions are taken out). After deducting $85.00, Social Security will then subtract from your regular monthly SSI benefit, half of what's left from your earnings. The result is the amount of SSI you will receive while working. Social Security will also deduct medical expenses that you pay that are related to your disability and that you need in order to work.

Here is an example of how earnings affect your SSI benefits. Suppose you are receiving $564.00 per month SSI and you have no other income. You start a job earning $915.00 per month. Social Security will subtract $85.00 from $915.00 which leaves $830.00. Social Security will then subtract $415.00 [which is half of $830.00] from $564.00. The difference is $149.00 per month which is the amount of SSI you will receive if you earn $915.00 per month.

If you earn too much [currently $1213 a month] to receive any SSI payment, your SSI will be automatically reinstated if your earnings go down unless

- You have not been eligible for an SSI check for 12 consecutive months; OR
- Social Security decides that you have medically improved and you are no longer eligible for SSI.
If you have not received an SSI check for more than 12 months, you may still be eligible to be reinstated on the SSI program as long as you are disabled and have been off SSI for less than 60 months. You must tell Social Security when your income has gone down in order for your benefits to be reinstated.

Social Security has a variety of programs to help people with disabilities get back into the workforce. To find out more about these programs, contact your local Social Security office.

**Medicaid**

A new program called Med-Works allows people eligible for Medicaid based on disability to return to the workforce without losing their Medicaid coverage as long as they still have a disabling medical condition. You can earn up to 350% of the federal poverty level [$2,717.00 per month in 2004] without losing Medicaid coverage. If your income is over $1,164.00 per month, you will have to pay a monthly premium to keep your Medicaid, starting at $48.00/month. The amount of your premium is based on your income. If you have to pay a premium, you will not have to meet a spend-down to qualify for coverage.

**Food Stamps**

If your income increases because you are working, your Food Stamps may decrease. The Food Stamp office will disregard 20% of your monthly gross earnings. Because certain expenses, such as very high shelter expenses, are taken into account when calculating your eligibility for Food Stamps, it is difficult to predict exactly how working will affect your Food Stamp benefits. However, a general rule is that each $3.00 of extra income will reduce your Food Stamps by approximately $1.00.

**Section 8 Voucher Program**

When you are on the Section 8 Voucher Program, your share of the rent is based on your income. A Section 8 voucher holder generally pays the highest of:

- 30% of household adjusted income;
- 10% of gross household income; OR
- the minimum rent for the area [usually $50.00 per month].

If you begin working, you must immediately tell your Section 8 caseworker about your job. You will not lose your Section 8 assistance just because you are working, but you may see an increase in your share of the rent because of an increase in your total income.

**Other Things To Keep in Mind**

You must report changes in your household income and size to the agency that administers the benefits you receive. It's not good enough to just tell one agency; you must tell them all. Any time an agency takes an action that you disagree with, you have the right to appeal. Each agency has a different procedure and time limit for appealing. You can get this information from your...
caseworker. Some procedures have very short deadlines, so don't delay if you think you may want to appeal.