Q. When should I contact Social Security to apply for retirement benefits?

A. You should contact Social Security about three to six months before your Social Security retirement date to determine what forms you need to fill out and which documents you will need to apply for retirement benefits.

Q. How do I apply for Social Security retirement benefits?

A. You can apply for retirement benefits online. Go to the Social Security Benefit Application and click on “Apply for Retirement/Disability/Spouse’s Benefits.” You can also apply by calling the Social Security Administration (SSA) toll-free at 1-800-772-1213. SSA representatives can make an appointment for your application to be taken over the telephone or at any convenient Social Security office.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you may call SSA’s toll-free TTY number, 1-800-325-0778, between 7 A.M. and 7 P.M., Monday through Friday.

Q. What information will I need to apply for Social Security benefits?

A. Depending on your circumstances, you will need some or all of the documents listed below. But do not delay applying for benefits because you do not have all the information. If you do not have a document you need, the SSA can help you get it.

- Social Security number;
- Birth certificate;
- W-2 forms or self-employment tax return for last year;
- Military discharge papers if you had military service prior to 1968;
- Spouse’s birth certificate and Social Security number if he or she is applying for benefits;
- Children’s birth certificates and Social Security numbers, if you are applying for benefits for them;
- Proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful alien status if you (or a spouse or child applying for benefits) were not born in the U.S.; and
- Name of your bank and your account number so your benefits can be directly deposited into your account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age To Receive Full Social Security Benefits</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Full Retirement Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1937 or earlier</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>65 and 2 months</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>65 and 4 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>65 and 6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>65 and 8 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>65 and 10 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943--1954</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>66 and 2 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>66 and 4 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>66 and 6 months</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>66 and 8 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>66 and 10 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960 and later</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. What is the full retirement age for Social Security?
A. It depends on when you were born. The full retirement age for Social Security benefits is currently 65 if you were born in 1937 or earlier. You can retire sooner, but your monthly benefits will be reduced. For example, if you were born in 1938, you may receive full benefits at age 65 years and 2 months; but, if you were born in 1960 you cannot receive full Social Security benefits until age 67. If you were born in 1960 or later, you can start receiving benefits at 62, but you will get 30% less than if you wait until 67 – not 20% less, like those retiring today. See the chart on the next page for more information.

Q. Should I begin my Social Security benefits at age 62 or at my full retirement age?

A. If you wait until your full retirement age to begin collecting Social Security payments, your monthly retirement checks will be higher. Most Americans retiring now (2008) can begin drawing full benefits at age 65. If you start drawing benefits at age 62, your payments will be 20% smaller, but you will get 36 more monthly checks than you would if you waited the additional three years. If you start drawing benefits before full retirement age, your earnings over $13,560 (in 2008) reduce your benefit $1 for every $2 you earn over the limit.

Q. Are Social Security benefits offset by distributions from State retirement?

A. No. Social security is paid on earned income and you’ve already paid social security on your retirement contributions.

Q. How are Social Security benefits affected when I work?

A. While you are working, your earnings will reduce your benefit amount only until you reach your full retirement age. A formula is used to determine how much your benefit must be reduced.

- If you are under full retirement age for the entire year, $1 is deducted from your benefit payments for every $2 you earn above the annual limit. For 2008, that limit is $13,560.
- In the year you reach full retirement age, $1 in benefits is deducted for every $3 you earn above a different limit, but only earnings before the month you reach your full retirement age are counted.
- If you will reach full retirement age in 2008, the limit on your earnings for the months before full retirement age is $36,120. (If you were born in 1943, your full retirement age is 66 years.)

Starting with the month you reach full retirement age, you can get your benefits with no limit on your earnings.

If you are not already receiving benefits, be sure to contact the SSA at the beginning of the year you reach full retirement age. Even if you are still working, you may be able to receive some or all of your benefits for the months before you reach full retirement age.

Q. How are Social Security benefits affected by taking benefits before the retirement age based on my year of birth?

A. If your full retirement age is older than 65 (that is, you were born after 1937), you still will be able to take your retirement benefits at age 62, but the reduction in your benefit amount will be greater than it was previously. Here’s how it works. If your full retirement age is 67, the reduction for starting your benefits at age:

- 62 is about 30 percent;
- age 63 is about 25 percent;
- age 64 is about 20 percent;
- age 65 is about 13 and 1/3 percent; and
- age 66 is about 6 and 2/3 percent.
As a general rule, early retirement will give you about the same total Social Security benefits as full retirement over your lifetime, but in smaller amounts to take into account the longer period you will receive them.

The earliest a person can start receiving Social Security retirement benefits will remain age 62. If you delay your retirement until after you reach full retirement age, your benefit will increase but you will not receive as many payments.

Q. Do I have to pay income tax on my Social Security benefits?

A. You will have to pay federal taxes on your benefits if you file a federal tax return as an "individual" and your total income is more than $25,000. If you file a joint return, you will have to pay taxes if you and your spouse have a total income that is more than $32,000.