

When Should You Collect Social Security?

When should you begin collecting Social Security? The answer depends in part on how long you think you'll be around to collect it.

Callout:

Those choosing to collect before their normal retirement age face a reduction in monthly payments by as much as 30%.

Social Media Message:

When should you collect Social Security? The answer may depend on how long you'll be around to collect it.

A growing number of Americans have been forced to delay their planned retirement date due to job and savings losses suffered during the past five years. According to a survey, 40% of U.S. workers said they have resolved to retire later due to concerns about outliving their savings and fears of rising health care costs.¹ Postponing retirement not only means working longer, but also delaying when you start collecting Social Security. Currently, workers can begin collecting Social Security as early as age 62 and as late as age 70. The longer you wait to start collecting, the higher your monthly payment will be. Your Social Security monthly payment is based on your earnings history and the age at which you begin collecting compared with your normal retirement age. This normal retirement age depends on the year you were born.

Year Born	Normal Retirement Age
1937 or earlier	65
1938	65 and 2 months
1939	65 and 4 months
1940	65 and 6 months
1941	65 and 8 months
1942	65 and 10 months
1943-1954	66
1955	66 and 2 months
1956	66 and 4 months

1957	66 and 6 months
1958	66 and 8 months
1959	66 and 10 months
1960 or later	67

Those choosing to collect before their normal retirement age face a reduction in monthly payments by as much as 30%. What's more, there is a stiff penalty for anyone who collects early and earns wages in excess of an annual earnings limit (\$14,160 in 2011).

For those opting to delay collecting until after their normal retirement age, monthly payments increase by an amount that varies based on the year you were born. For each month you delay retirement past your normal retirement age, your monthly benefit will increase between 0.29% per month for someone born in 1925, to 0.67% for someone born after 1942.

Which is right for you will depend upon your financial situation as well as your anticipated life expectancy. Anyone with a good pension or substantial savings may want to delay a bit. Similarly, if you're in no hurry to retire, you may want to continue working longer and collect later.

Likewise, those with a family history of longevity who expect to live a long time stand to gain more by delaying. If you think it unlikely to survive beyond age 78, you may want to start collecting at age 62. And if you expect to survive beyond age 82, you might consider a delayed collection.

Whenever you decide to begin collecting, keep in mind that Social Security represents only 38% of the average retiree's income.² So you'll need to save and plan ahead -- regardless of whether you collect sooner or later.

Source/Disclaimer

¹Source: Towers Watson, October 2010.

²Source: Social Security Administration, "Fast Facts & Figures About Social Security," August 2011.

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