

# Your Retirement Benefit: How It Is Figured

2011



As you make plans for your retirement, you may ask, "How much will I get from Social Security?" There are several ways you can find out. Social Security sends a yearly *Social Security Statement* to everyone age 25 or older who has paid Social Security taxes and has not yet received benefits. You should receive a *Statement* about three months before your birthday each year.

You also can request a *Statement* online at [www.socialsecurity.gov/onlineservices](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/onlineservices). Or, you can request a *Statement* by calling Social Security and asking for a form SSA-7004, *Request for Social Security Statement*. You can use the Retirement Estimator at [www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator) to find out how much you might receive.

Many people wonder how their benefit is figured. Social Security benefits are based on your lifetime earnings. Your actual earnings are adjusted or "indexed" to account for changes in average wages since the year the earnings were received. Then Social Security calculates your average indexed monthly earnings during the 35 years in which you earned the most. We apply a formula to these earnings and arrive at your basic benefit, or "primary insurance amount" (PIA). This is how much you would receive at your full retirement age—65 or older, depending on your date of birth.

On the back of this page is a worksheet you can use to estimate your retirement benefit if you were born in 1949. It is only an estimate; for specific information, talk with a Social Security representative.

## Factors that can change the amount of your retirement benefit

- *You choose to get benefits before your full retirement age.* You can begin to receive Social Security benefits as early as age 62, but at a reduced rate. Your basic benefit will be reduced by a certain percentage if you retire before reaching full retirement age.
- *You are eligible for cost-of-living benefit increases starting with the year you become age 62.* This is true even if you do not get benefits until your full retirement age or even age 70. Cost-of-living increases are added to your benefit beginning with the year you reach 62 up to the year you start receiving benefits.

- *You delay your retirement past your full retirement age.* Social Security benefits are increased by a certain percentage (depending on your date of birth) if you delay receiving benefits until after your full retirement age. If you do so, your benefit amount will be increased until you start taking benefits or you reach age 70.
- *You are a government worker with a pension.* If you also get or are eligible for a pension from work where you did not pay Social Security taxes (usually a government job), a different formula is applied to your average indexed monthly earnings. To find out how the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) affects your benefits, go to [www.socialsecurity.gov/gpo-wep](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/gpo-wep) and use the WEP online calculator. You also can review the WEP fact sheet to find out how your benefit is figured. Or, you can contact Social Security and ask for *Windfall Elimination Provision* (Publication No. 05-10045).

You may find a more detailed explanation about how your retirement benefit is calculated in the *Annual Statistical Supplement, 2009, Appendix D*. The publication is available on the Internet at [www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement) or you can order a paper copy by writing to the Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954.

## Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We can provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.

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## Estimating your Social Security retirement benefit

**For workers born in 1949 (people born in 1949 become age 62 in 2011 and are eligible for a benefit)**

This worksheet shows how to estimate the Social Security monthly retirement benefit you would be eligible for at age 62 if you were born in 1949. It also allows you to estimate what you would receive at age 66, your full retirement age, **excluding any cost-of-living adjustments for which you may be eligible**. If you continue working past age 62, your additional earnings could increase your benefit. People born after 1949 can use this worksheet, but their actual benefit may be higher due to additional earnings and benefit increases. If you were born before 1949, please go online at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or contact us for your worksheet.

**Step 1:** Enter your actual earnings in Column B, but not more than the amount shown in Column A. If you have no earnings, enter "0."

**Step 2:** Multiply the amounts in Column B by the index factors in Column C, and enter the results in Column D. This gives you your indexed earnings, or the approximate value of your earnings in current dollars.

**Step 3:** Choose from Column D the 35 years with the highest amounts. Add these amounts. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 4:** Divide the result from Step 3 by 420 (the number of months in 35 years). Round down to the next lowest dollar. This will give you your average indexed monthly earnings. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 5:** a. Multiply the first \$749 in Step 4 by 90%. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

b. Multiply the amount in Step 4 over \$749 and less than or equal to \$4,517 by 32%. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

c. Multiply the amount in Step 4 over \$4,517 by 15%. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 6:** Add a, b and c from Step 5. Round down to the next lowest dollar. This is your estimated monthly retirement benefit at age 66, your full retirement age. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 7:** Multiply the amount in Step 6 by 75%. This is your estimated monthly retirement benefit if you retire at age 62. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Year	A. Maximum earnings	B. Actual earnings	C. Index factor	D. Indexed earnings
1951	\$3,600		14.54	
1952	3,600		13.69	
1953	3,600		12.97	
1954	3,600		12.90	
1955	4,200		12.33	
1956	4,200		11.53	
1957	4,200		11.18	
1958	4,200		11.08	
1959	4,800		10.56	
1960	4,800		10.16	
1961	4,800		9.96	
1962	4,800		9.49	
1963	4,800		9.26	
1964	4,800		8.90	
1965	4,800		8.74	
1966	6,600		8.24	
1967	6,600		7.81	
1968	7,800		7.31	
1969	7,800		6.91	
1970	7,800		6.58	
1971	7,800		6.27	
1972	9,000		5.71	
1973	10,800		5.37	
1974	13,200		5.07	
1975	14,100		4.72	
1976	15,300		4.41	
1977	16,500		4.16	
1978	17,700		3.86	
1979	22,900		3.55	
1980	25,900		3.25	

Year	A. Maximum earnings	B. Actual earnings	C. Index factor	D. Indexed earnings
1981	29,700		2.96	
1982	32,400		2.80	
1983	35,700		2.67	
1984	37,800		2.52	
1985	39,600		2.42	
1986	42,000		2.35	
1987	43,800		2.21	
1988	45,000		2.11	
1989	48,000		2.03	
1990	51,300		1.94	
1991	53,400		1.87	
1992	55,500		1.78	
1993	57,600		1.76	
1994	60,600		1.71	
1995	61,200		1.65	
1996	62,700		1.57	
1997	65,400		1.48	
1998	68,400		1.41	
1999	72,600		1.34	
2000	76,200		1.27	
2001	80,400		1.24	
2002	84,900		1.22	
2003	87,000		1.20	
2004	87,900		1.14	
2005	90,000		1.10	
2006	94,200		1.05	
2007	97,500		1.01	
2008	102,000		0.98	
2009-2010	106,800		1.00	



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