

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY (SSD) PROCESS

**(Disclaimer: This article only gives suggestions. You can decide if you want to follow these tips or not.)**

Applying for social security disability (SSDI or SSI), can be a daunting and often an overwhelming process. In addition, most people are too inexperienced to adequately develop the evidence needed to prove disability. Social Security has specific procedures to go through and if you make any mistakes your application will be denied. The most important advice I want to give is: **Don't go through the process alone.**

**Here are some more tips that I learned during my journey with the SSD process:**

1. Allow your spouse, partner or friend to assist you in the process. For me, I was recovering from post concussive syndrome and needed a support system during this process. I had a social worker assist me with the application process. My husband reviewed my answers to questionnaires from SSD and gave me more ideas as well.
2. I recommend hiring an experienced SSD attorney to help with your claim starting at the application process. People who hire lawyers knowledgeable about Social Security Disability Insurance Benefit claims have an improved likelihood of qualifying for benefits. SSD Attorneys are only paid if they win a case. For example, I live in Phoenix, AZ. I worked with a social worker during my application process which was denied the first time. I was referred to a very experienced SSD attorney. I did not pay any money upfront. When my case was determined eligible, my attorney got up to \$6000.00, which is the **maximum** amount given, of my SSD back pay. I was given two years back pay and her fee was well worth it!
3. When choosing an attorney, even if you have a personal referral, always look at the firm's website. The website needs to be transparent. That is, most attorneys include the steps to applying for disability and some helpful ideas. The attorney might post disabilities that are always determined eligible the first time you apply. My husband has a friend named Victor who has end stage cirrhosis of the liver. Victor was referred to an attorney who lived out of his state. Victor's case was denied the first time he applied. I looked up the attorney's website and there was NO information about or related to the disability process. The attorney did not educate Victor about the disability procedures and caseworker interviews. Victor changed attorneys but had to wait two years for an administrative hearing.
4. Get familiar with the social security administration website ([ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov)). Learn all you can about the eligibility requirements. Certain disabilities are automatically covered. Knowledge is power!

5. Gather as much medical evidence from your doctor as possible before applying. When getting documentation regarding your disability from your doctor, make sure it emphasizes how your diagnoses impairs your daily functional capacity. Also, by submitting your medical records at the same time that you apply for disability, you can shorten the time for evaluation of your claim. Keep copies of your medical records.
6. Keep in communication with the SSA. Always respond promptly to requests for information from the SSA. Social Security might authorize specific evaluations such as a psychological assessment. It is essential that you keep appointments and not miss deadlines, as doing so will lead to your claim being denied. Keep in consistent communication with your Disability Determination Caseworker. This can make a difference as to whether or not your case gets the attention it deserves.
7. Keep seeing your physicians as scheduled and follow treatment recommendations. If you are not following your doctor's directions, you need to have a very good reason. If you don't, this can be used as a basis to deny your claim. The SSA may determine that your medical condition is not as severe as you claim. Whether or not you take the medicine that is prescribed can affect how Social Security views your impairments.
8. If possible, meet with your physicians to complete Functional Residual Capacity forms. You will receive these forms after you submit your application to SSA. If you have an attorney, the attorney should tell you what information will be pertinent to your case. You can pass the information to your doctors.
9. If your case is denied after your initial application, ask your attorney to give you the case notes and information in your SSD case file. You might find errors that will improve your chances of being determined eligible.
10. Finally, stay involved in your SSD case, even if you have an attorney. **This is critical.** I have a friend name Ruth who has Crohn's disease, Anxiety and Major Depressive Disorder. She initially hired an attorney and stayed actively in contact with his office to monitor her case. Ruth contacted the legal assistant who was assigned to her case. She learned that the legal assistant did not request any medical records regarding her Crohn's disease, which was her primary illness. Ruth reported this information to her attorney and the situation was rectified. She was determined eligible for SSD after her initial application. If Ruth did not stay involved in her case she would have been denied.

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