VEYL RESOURCE GUIDE

Social Security Claiming Considerations

A plain-English guide to understanding claiming age, full retirement age, spouse and survivor considerations, working while receiving benefits, taxes, and income coordination.

Understand the household impact before you claim.

A PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING

- Claiming age
- Full retirement age
- Spouse & survivor considerations
- Working while receiving benefits
- Taxes and income coordination
- Questions before filing

Veyl Advisors
Retirement clarity, guided.

Social Security is not simply an age decision.

You may begin retirement benefits as early as age 62, but the age you choose can permanently affect your monthly payment.

62
Earliest claiming age for most retired workers. For someone whose full retirement age is 67, claiming at 62 can reduce the monthly retirement benefit by as much as 30%.

67
Full retirement age for people born in 1960 or later; generally when an unreduced retirement benefit is available.

70
Benefits can continue increasing after full retirement age through delayed retirement credits. Delay increases stop after age 70.

A simplified example

If someone’s benefit at age 67 were $2,000 per month:

$1,400
At 62

$2,000
At 67

$2,480
At 70

This assumes a full retirement age of 67 and does not represent an individual recommendation.

The decision is not only “When am I allowed to claim?”
It is also: “How does each claiming age fit the income I may need for the rest of retirement?”

Source note: Social Security Administration. Individual benefits depend on earnings history, birth year, and claiming month.

Your claiming age is only one part of the calculation.

Social Security generally calculates retirement benefits using your highest 35 years of indexed earnings. If you have fewer than 35 years of covered earnings, years without earnings are generally included as zeros.

Your earnings history

Higher covered earnings generally produce a higher benefit, subject to annual limits.

The number of years worked

Fewer than 35 years of earnings may lower the average used in the calculation. Continuing to work may increase a future benefit when a new higher-earning year replaces an earlier low-earning or zero year.

Your claiming age

Claiming before full retirement age reduces the monthly amount. Delaying after full retirement age can increase it until age 70.

The accuracy of your record

Missing or incorrect earnings could affect the benefit calculated from your work history.

A useful point of reference

$2,071

Estimated average benefit for all retired workers in January 2026.

$3,208

Estimated average for an aged couple when both receive benefits.

These are broad national averages—not estimates of what a specific person should expect.

Before filing

Does your expected benefit reflect your actual work record—or have you only looked at a general estimate?

Source note: Social Security Administration, 2026 benefit and earnings-record information.

A claiming decision may affect more than one person.

For married couples, Social Security should generally be viewed as a household-income decision—not two unrelated individual decisions.

Spouse benefits

Up to 50%

A spouse's full benefit may be worth up to 50% of the worker's full-retirement-age benefit. Claiming before the spouse's full retirement age can permanently reduce that amount.

Delayed retirement credits earned by the worker do not increase the maximum spouse benefit while both spouses are living. If someone qualifies for both their own retirement benefit and a spouse benefit, Social Security generally pays their own benefit first and then adds only enough spouse benefit to reach the higher combined amount.

Survivor benefits

71.5%–100%

A surviving spouse may receive approximately 71.5% to 100% of the deceased spouse's benefit, depending on when the survivor claims.

Unlike regular spouse benefits, a higher benefit earned by delaying the higher earner's retirement claim can matter to the surviving spouse later. Survivor rules may allow someone to begin one benefit and switch to another later.

Divorced spouses

A divorced person may qualify on a former spouse's record when the marriage lasted at least 10 years, the applicant is generally at least 62 and unmarried, and other requirements are met. In some cases, a divorced spouse may qualify even when the former spouse has not filed, provided both are at least 62 and the divorce has lasted at least two years.

The household question
If the higher earner died first, how much Social Security income would remain for the surviving spouse?

Source note: Social Security Administration. Marriage, divorce, remarriage, age, caregiving, and individual benefit eligibility can change the rules.

You can work and receive Social Security—but timing matters.

The retirement earnings test may temporarily reduce payments when someone claims before full retirement age and continues earning wages or net self-employment income.

$24,480

2026 annual earnings limit if you remain below full retirement age throughout the year. Social Security generally withholds $1 in benefits for every $2 earned above the limit.

$65,160

2026 limit during the year you reach full retirement age, counting only earnings before the month full retirement age is reached. Social Security generally withholds $1 for every $3 earned above that limit.

No limit

Beginning with the month you reach full retirement age, there is no retirement earnings-test limit.

Benefits withheld because of the earnings test are not necessarily permanently lost. At full retirement age, Social Security may recalculate the monthly benefit to provide credit for months in which payments were withheld.

The earnings test generally counts wages and net self-employment income. Pensions, investments, capital gains, and inheritances generally do not count as earnings under this test.

Taxes are a separate issue

Depending on filing status and combined income, up to 85% of Social Security benefits may be included in federally taxable income. That does not mean an 85% tax rate applies.

$25,000

Individual return federal combined-income threshold begins above this level.

$32,000

Joint return federal combined-income threshold begins above this level.

Oregon does not tax Social Security benefits, although other retirement income may be taxable by the state.

If you claim while working, have you considered both the earnings test and the tax impact—or only one of them?

Source note: Social Security Administration and Oregon Department of Revenue. Tax treatment depends on individual circumstances; consult a qualified tax professional.

Social Security is an income-planning decision, not only a break-even calculation.

A break-even age compares the total dollars received from claiming earlier with the larger payments available from claiming later. That can be useful—but it leaves out several factors that may matter more to the household.

Health and longevity

Someone who delays generally needs to live long enough for the higher monthly payments to offset the benefits they chose not to receive earlier.

18.4

Additional years for men at age 65, based on 2026 projections.

20.9

Additional years for women at age 65, based on 2026 projections.

These are population averages. Individual health, family history, and longevity can differ substantially.

Other factors

- Cash-flow needs
- Spouse and survivor protection
- Taxes and withdrawals
- Inflation-adjusted income

Some households genuinely need income earlier. Others may be able to use employment income, savings, pensions, or retirement accounts while allowing Social Security to increase. For couples, delaying the higher earner's benefit may affect the income available to the surviving spouse.

The better question
Not simply: “At what age do I break even?” But: “Which claiming approach best supports income, flexibility, and the surviving spouse throughout retirement?”

Source note: Social Security Administration. Life-expectancy figures are population estimates and do not predict an individual lifespan.

Common Social Security decisions that deserve a closer look.

01

Claiming at 62 simply because it is available

Early claiming may be appropriate, but availability alone does not make it the best fit.

02

Treating break-even age as the only factor

Cash flow, health, longevity, taxes, other assets, and survivor income may matter as much as cumulative dollars.

03

Reviewing each spouse separately

One spouse's decision may affect both current household income and the benefit remaining after the first death.

04

Forgetting the earnings test

Claiming before full retirement age while continuing to work may temporarily reduce benefit payments.

05

Ignoring tax and withdrawal coordination

Social Security, wages, pensions, retirement-account withdrawals, and investment income can interact within the larger tax picture.

06

Filing before verifying the earnings record

Social Security bases retirement benefits on reported earnings. Errors or missing years should be reviewed before filing.

Current public-pension update

The Social Security Fairness Act repealed the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset for benefits payable beginning in January 2024. People with pensions from work that did not pay into Social Security should not rely on old estimates that still apply WEP or GPO.

Which part of your claiming decision is currently based on an assumption rather than confirmed information?

Source note: Social Security Administration. Rules and benefit estimates should be reviewed using current information.

What should be reviewed before pressing the filing button?

Confirm full retirement age
Full retirement age depends on birth year and determines when an unreduced retirement benefit is generally available.

Compare multiple claiming dates
Review personalized estimates at 62, full retirement age, 70, and any realistic date in between.

Check the earnings record
Verify that yearly earnings are complete and accurate. Benefits are generally based on the highest 35 years of indexed earnings.

Review spouse, survivor, and divorce rules
Determine whether the decision could affect a current spouse, surviving spouse, or qualifying former spouse.

Consider continued employment
Estimate how wages or self-employment income could affect payments before full retirement age.

Coordinate income and taxes
Consider how Social Security may interact with wages, pensions, retirement-account withdrawals, investment income, and federal taxation.

Do not forget Medicare
Social Security full retirement age and Medicare eligibility are separate. Delaying Social Security beyond age 65 does not automatically mean Medicare should also be delayed.

Use personalized information
An official my Social Security account allows someone to review earnings history and personalized benefit estimates based on different claiming ages.

Have you reviewed Social Security as part of your complete retirement-income plan—or only as an isolated monthly check?

Source note: Social Security Administration and Medicare. Medicare enrollment decisions depend on individual coverage and employment circumstances.

NEXT STEP

Claiming confidence begins before the filing button.

There is no single claiming age that is automatically right for everyone.

The decision may depend on:

- Current income needs
- Employment plans
- Health and longevity
- Savings and retirement accounts
- Spouse and survivor income
- Tax coordination
- Medicare timing
- Household flexibility later

A thoughtful claiming review should help clarify:

- How monthly income changes at different ages
- Whether waiting is financially realistic
- How the decision affects a spouse
- What income would remain after the first death
- Whether work could temporarily affect payments
- How Social Security fits with the rest of retirement

Recommended next step

The Veyl Retirement Assessment is a low-pressure way to identify areas of a retirement plan that may deserve a closer look—including Social Security, Medicare, income, healthcare, and household decision-making.

Take the Retirement Assessment

See how Social Security may fit into your broader retirement picture before making an irrevocable decision.

Want a personalized Social Security analysis?

A personalized analysis can help you compare different claiming ages and better understand how each option may affect you and your household.

- Your personalized benefit estimates
- Early, full-retirement-age, and delayed claiming
- Spouse and survivor benefits
- Divorced-spouse or widow/widower rules, when applicable
- Working while receiving benefits
- Household cash-flow needs
- The effect of claiming on the surviving spouse
- How Social Security may coordinate with the rest of retirement

Book a Social Security Analysis

Meet with Landon Richardson, Registered Social Security Analyst®, for a personalized review of your claiming considerations. This is a paid professional service. Pricing and appointment details are provided on the Veyl Social Security page.