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### Social Security Basics: What You Should Know



Congratulations if you are approaching retirement age! Before you plan that big party, however, make sure that you have put some thought into when to claim your Social Security benefits. While you may be tempted to start collecting these benefits as soon as you reach the minimum age of 62, there are other factors to consider when making this decision such as your marital status, other income, and family structure. Social Security considers age 70 as full retirement age. A claimant who begins taking benefits at age 70 receives the maximum monthly benefit available. If you take your benefits before this age, your lifetime monthly benefit will be reduced by a small percentage.

There are three basic factors to consider when deciding whether or not to begin your stream of Social Security benefits. First is your health. If you are suffering from a chronic or terminal illness, you may not want to delay this benefit. Second, do you need the money? If you are still working, you may want to delay claiming your Social Security benefits until you no longer have an income stream from your employment. If, however, you are relying on Social Security as your primary retirement income, you likely will need to begin claiming your benefit sooner rather than later. Third, and perhaps the most complicated, is your marital status and other similar issues. If you are married, when you decide to claim your benefits could impact how much your spouse receives if you predecease your spouse. So long as you are married for at least nine months, a surviving spouse receives the higher of what he or she was originally receiving or what a predeceased spouse was entitled to receive. Another important point is you may be able to receive benefits based on your former spouse's earnings even if you are divorced. If you were married for at least 10 years, are at least age 62 and currently single, you can file a restricted claim for spousal benefits. Some individuals do this to delay claiming their own benefits until age 70 when their benefits reach the maximum amount.

There are resources available to assist you in planning for this important benefit. For example, the Social Security Administration has several pages on its website dedicated to providing information about claiming your benefits.

(see <https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/planner/agereduction.html>).

We are also available to answer your questions. Give us a call to discuss your retirement planning concerns!

