

## 8 reasons why continuing to treat is important to a claim

Receiving medical treatment is vital to any disability claim. The absence of medical treatment can result in a denial or even a suspension of benefits. While treatment at the onset of a disability may be required to obtain a diagnosis and determine an initial treatment course, it is equally important to continue with ongoing treatment to move toward medical improvement and support a case for ongoing benefits. We have listed eight reasons why continuing treatment is important to a claim.

### 1 A disability claim cannot be approved without medical evidence

To make a decision on a Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claim, Social Security requires sufficient medical evidence documenting the impairment or group of impairments that are keeping the claimant out of work. Without medical evidence, the Social Security Administration (SSA) cannot approve an SSDI claim. It is particularly important to have comprehensive and current medical information to help Social Security make the most accurate decision possible.

### 2 Continued treatment can help establish a longitudinal medical record

A longitudinal medical record combines records and evidence from various healthcare settings into one continuous record giving treating providers access to the overall picture of a claimant's health almost instantly. Ensuring the proper care and course of treatment is imperative, and without coordination of said care, it can be difficult to determine which course of treatment is the best. By continuing treatment, a medical continuum can become available to various healthcare professionals, as well as any other parties that may need to be involved in the treatment plan.

### 3 A more accurate list of medications is readily available

During the initial application for SSDI benefits, Social Security requests a list of any prescription and non-prescription drugs the claimant is taking. Social Security can request a more recent list at any time, and it is required upon appeal and if a hearing is held before an Administrative Law Judge. As side effects of medications may hinder or hide medical improvement, Social Security needs to know what medications the claimant is taking to reconcile that information with the medical evidence on file.

### 4 Consultative Examinations may not be required

Consultative Exams (CE) may provide vital medical evidence when existing records are insufficient to prove disability, or when the available medical records provide contradictory or non-definitive conclusions. Unfortunately, CEs may delay the decision-making process and may be physically or mentally uncomfortable for the claimant. If comprehensive and current medical evidence is available and subsequently obtained, Social Security may not need to request a CE to make a determination on the claim. While having sufficient medical evidence is not always enough to avoid the need for a CE, the more up-to-date and accurate information available, the less likely Social Security will be to request one.

### 5 Claimants can continue to remain engaged in the process

The Social Security process can be long and frustrating. Unfortunately, when Social Security is collecting medical evidence to make a decision, there is little a claimant can do to speed up the process, besides requesting their providers promptly respond to medical record requests. There is even less to do when an examiner is making a decision. By continuing their treatment, claimants remain involved and engaged in the process, ensuring up-to-date medical information is ready to support their claim.

### 6 Continued treatment can provide support to avoid a disability mindset

It can be easy for a claimant applying for disability benefits to fall into a "disability mindset." This occurs when an injured or ill person focuses on limitations and perceived weaknesses instead of abilities. It will not always be possible to avoid each aspect of a disability mindset, but, with support from providers and other healthcare professionals, a claimant that continues to treat and works toward medical improvement is significantly less likely to fall into such a state.

### 7 New or worsening conditions are more easily recognized

It is important for Social Security to be kept apprised of any new or worsening conditions that may arise during the application process. It is particularly important to update Social Security during their review, either before an initial determination or at the stages of appeal. If a claimant is denied but displays new or worsening conditions, they can file a new application with those conditions. Without continued treatment, it is not possible to provide the medical support for any changes in condition.

### 8 Social Security looks for a track record of treatment

Social Security regulations require that each approved SSDI claim undergo a continuing disability review (CDR) at least once every seven years. To determine that the claimant continues to meet the strict standards established by Social Security, updated medical evidence must be obtained at the time of the CDR. Regular, continued treatment can support ongoing disability, confirming no medical improvement has occurred since the original approval. For individuals who expect to be out of work for an extended period of time, regular treatment can support any subsequent continuing disability reviews (CDRs) as they occur.

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