



# Military Service and Social Security

Earnings for active duty military service or active duty training have been covered under Social Security since 1957.

Social Security has covered inactive duty service in the armed forces reserves (such as weekend drills) since 1988.

If you served in the military before 1957, you didn't pay Social Security taxes, but we gave you special credit for some of your service.

You can get both Social Security benefits and military retirement. Generally, there is no reduction of Social Security benefits because of your military retirement benefits. You'll get your full Social Security benefit based on your earnings.

## Social Security and Medicare taxes

While you're in military service, you pay Social Security taxes, just as civilian employees do. You currently pay a 6.2 percent Social Security tax on up to \$137,700 of your earnings. The Medicare tax rate is 1.45 percent on all wages, and high-income earners pay an additional 0.9 percent on earnings above certain amounts.

## How your work qualifies you for Social Security

To qualify for benefits, you must earn credits by working and paying Social Security taxes. The number of credits you need to qualify depends on your age and the type of benefit for which you're eligible. In 2020, you'll receive four credits if you earn at least \$5,640. The minimum amount of earnings needed to get credit for your work goes up each year. The maximum number of credits you can earn in one year is four. No one needs more than 10 years of work, or 40 credits.

## Extra earnings

Your Social Security benefit depends on your earnings, averaged over your working lifetime. Generally, the higher your earnings, the higher your Social Security benefit. Under certain circumstances, special earnings can be credited to your military pay record for Social Security purposes. The extra earnings are for periods

of active duty or active duty for training. These extra earnings may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit.

If you served in the military after 1956, you paid Social Security taxes on those earnings. Since 1988, inactive duty service in the armed forces reserves (such as weekend drills) has also been covered by Social Security.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for periods of active duty from 1957 through 2001 can also be credited to your Social Security earnings record.

- **From 1957 through 1967**, we will add the extra credits to your record when you apply for Social Security benefits.
- **From 1968 through 2001**, you don't need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to your record.
- **After 2001**, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service.

The information that follows explains how you can get credit for special extra earnings and applies only to active duty military service earnings from **1957 through 2001**.

- **From 1957 through 1977**, you're credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which you received active duty basic pay.
- **From 1978 through 2001**, for every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you're credited with an additional \$100 in earnings up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. If you enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or your full tour, you may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details.

**If you served in the military from 1940 through 1956**, including attendance at a service academy, you didn't pay Social Security taxes. However, your Social Security record may be credited with \$160 a month in earnings for military service from September 16, 1940, through December 31, 1956, under the following circumstances:

- You were honorably discharged after 90 or more days of service, or you were released because of a disability or injury received in the line of duty; or
- You're still on active duty; or
- You're applying for survivors benefits and the veteran died while on active duty.

You can't receive credit for these special earnings if you're already receiving a federal benefit based on the same years of service. There is one exception: If you were on active duty after 1956, you can still get the special earnings for 1951 through 1956, even if you're receiving a military retirement based on service during that period.

### These extra earnings credits are added to your earnings record when you apply for Social Security benefits.

**NOTE:** *In all cases, the additional earnings are credited to the earnings that we average over your working lifetime, not directly to your monthly benefit amount.*

## Your benefits

In addition to retirement benefits, Social Security pays survivors benefits to your family when you die. You also can get Social Security benefits for you and your family if you become disabled. For more information about these benefits, read *Understanding the Benefits* (Publication No. 05-10024).

If you became disabled while on active military service on or after October 1, 2001, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors) to find out how you can receive expedited processing of your disability claim.

When you apply for Social Security benefits, you'll be asked for proof of your military service (DD Form 214) or information about your Reserve or National Guard service.

## When you are eligible for Medicare

If you have health care insurance from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or under the TRICARE or CHAMPVA program, your health benefits may change or end when you become eligible for Medicare. You should contact the VA, the Department of Defense or a military health benefits advisor for more information.

## You can work and get retirement benefits

You can retire as early as age 62. But if you do, your Social Security benefits will be reduced and won't be increased when you reach full retirement age. If you decide to apply for benefits before your full retirement age, you can work and still get some Social Security benefits. There are limits on how much you can earn without losing some or all of your retirement benefits. These limits can change each year. When you apply for benefits, we'll tell you what the limits are at that time and whether work will affect your monthly benefits.

When you reach your full retirement age, you can earn as much as you are able and still get all of your Social Security benefits.

The full retirement age is 66 for people born from 1943 through 1954, and it will gradually increase to age 67 for those born in 1960 and later. To help you decide the best time to retire, read *Retirement Benefits* (Publication No. 05-10035).

## Contacting Social Security

The most convenient way to contact us from anywhere, on any device, is to visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov). There are several things you can do online: apply for benefits; get useful information; find publications; and get answers to frequently asked questions.

When you open a *my* Social Security account, you have more capabilities. You can review your *Social Security Statement*, verify your earnings, and print a benefit verification letter. You can also change your direct deposit information, request a replacement Medicare card, request a replacement Social Security card (if you have no changes and your state participates), and get a replacement SSA-1099/1042S.

If you don't have access to the internet, we offer many automated services by telephone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**, if you're deaf or hard of hearing.

A member of our staff can answer your call from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday, if you need to speak to a person. We ask for your patience during busy periods since you may experience a high rate of busy signals and longer hold times to speak to us. We look forward to serving you.



Securing today  
and tomorrow

Social Security Administration  
Publication No. 05-10017  
January 2020 (Recycle prior editions)  
Military Service and Social Security  
Produced and published at U.S. taxpayer expense