

How to Prepare for Your Social Security Hearing



1. Review your file from the Social Security Office of Hearings Operations (OHO).

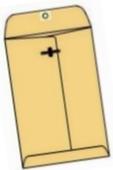
By the time you get your hearing date, OHO should send you a CD with all the medical and disability-related records in your file. If you have an email address, you can call OHO and ask them to send you these records through a password-protected email. If you don't get these records, call OHO and ask for them: (866) 414-6259.



2. Request recent medical records and make copies *as soon as possible*.

Medical records are the **most important part** of Social Security decisions. OHO most likely doesn't have any medical records from the past 2-3 years.

- When Social Security mails you a letter with your hearing date, the letter will have forms about your medical conditions and treatment. Fill out these forms and sign any releases giving Social Security permission to get copies of your medical records.
- Get your medical records that show your conditions mean you can't work. Get them from doctors, therapists, case workers, hospitals, or ERs you've been to in the past 2-3 years.
- *If you haven't had any recent medical treatment:* At the start of your hearing, ask the judge to order a Social Security medical exam (also called a "Consultative Exam") for you. The judge may ask you to explain why you haven't had any recent treatment.



3. Give medical records to OHO at least 5 business days before your hearing.

- Submit your medical records using the instructions in any letters Social Security sends you. Make a copy of all records submitting them.
- *If you can't get your records in time:* call OHO at least 5 days before the hearing. Explain that you tried but couldn't get your records. At the hearing, you can ask the judge for more time to submit records, but the judge may deny your request.



4. Be ready to talk about your mental and physical health at the hearing.

At the hearing, you have to explain in detail how your mental and physical health conditions interfere with your ability to work full time. Be prepared to explain:

- What medications you take and any side-effects **or** why you don't take medication.
- *If you have mental conditions:* how they affect your ability to (1) understand or remember instructions, (2) concentrate and stay on task, (3) interact, or (4) take care of yourself.
- *If you have physical conditions:* how they affect your ability to (1) walk, sit, or stand, (2) hold, lift, or move objects, or (3) see, hear, or speak.
- *If you have a history of substance abuse:* why your physical and mental health conditions (**not** your substance use) are the reason you are not able to work. You can't get Social Security disability benefits if your substance use is the main reason you can't work.