

How to prepare for your Social Security hearing

1) Review your file at the Social Security Office of Hearing Operations (OHO).

OHO should send you a CD that contains all medical and disability-related records in your file. If you have not received this CD by the time you have a hearing date, call OHO and ask for it:

1 (866) 414-6259.

2) Request updated medical records.

OHO most likely does not have your recent medical records, i.e. any medical records from the past 2-3 years. Therefore, you should request them from any doctor, therapist, case worker, or hospital you have seen recently. This includes any emergency room visits. If you have not had any recent medical treatment by your hearing date, explain to the Social Security judge why, and ask her/him to order a Social Security medical exam (also called a “Consultative Exam”) for you.

3) Give medical records to OHO at least five (5) business days before hearing.

You should give your medical records to OHO as soon as possible. A Social Security rule says that you must give to OHO any records you want the Social Security judge to consider at least five business days before the hearing. If you have trouble getting any medical records, call OHO and ask for their help in getting the records.

4) At your hearing, be prepared to talk about how often and how bad your physical and/or mental problems are.

Do they happen hourly, daily, or weekly? How bad is the physical and/or mental pain when you are going through it?

5) Give specific examples of your problems.

For example, if you have depression, explain how your depression affects your ability to understand or concentrate on things, talk with others, and/or take care of yourself. Do you think that these problems affect your ability to work? If so, how? Would you have to miss work because of your problems? If so, how often?

6) Be prepared to explain any substance abuse and why you might not be taking any medications.

For example, are you abusing substances to help deal with your medical condition? Do medications help your problems or make things worse? These are all important things to discuss with the judge.