



Your Medical History: A Crucial Component of Your Claim

How does the Social Security Administration (SSA) decide whether your condition is disabling? Although a variety of factors are taken into account in processing your claim, a critical component in your case lies in your medical records. It's crucial to provide SSA with all of the information necessary to understand your medical condition and how it relates to your inability to work.

That information includes: consultations with doctors; tests and evaluations such as x-rays, CAT scans, MRIs, blood tests; psychiatric examinations and consultations, if applicable; all hospitalizations and surgeries; physical rehabilitation, etc. The more medical documentation you have, the better. Be sure that you thoroughly discuss all of your symptoms and medical conditions with your doctor, including things you might consider trivial or embarrassing, like fatigue, pain and depression. Go regularly to your physician and make sure they document all of your symptoms each time, so that you have an accurate record to present to SSA when you file your claim.

After your case is sent to a disability examiner at the Disability Determination Service, the examiner and a physician will review your documentation. They may request additional medical documentation from your physician or other health providers involved in your treatment. They might also ask that you see another physician, or have additional tests, at their expense.

Once all of the medical information is gathered, they will decide whether your condition (or combination of conditions) is severe enough to be disabling, based on the merits of your records. If not, they determine if your condition is included in their List of Impairments, which includes 14 categories of the major bodily systems. Within each system, there is a breakdown of the different ailments that they consider disabling. If your medical condition is listed, then you might qualify for disability benefits on that basis. If not, then they will consider how your condition affects your ability to function in three areas: daily activities; social functioning; and ability to carry out tasks associated with working. They're looking for what they call a 'marked limitation' in your ability to function. If they find that you can't work in your previous job, they will determine if you could be employed doing something else. If your case is denied and goes to a hearing, the judge who hears your case will review all of the medical data collected in your case.

The judge will go through the same type of evaluation to decide if you meet the Social Security standard for disability.

Medical evidence is crucial in these cases. Make sure that you keep your doctors' appointments. Report your symptom to your doctors. Tell them how your symptoms limit your activities. This will help your case.