

FREE GUIDE — 2026 EDITION

# 5 Social Security Facts Most Retirees Don't Know

Social Security is more flexible — and more complicated — than most people realize. These five facts could change how much you collect over your lifetime.

The average retiree collects Social Security for **20 years or more**. Small decisions made at filing time can add up to tens of thousands of dollars over that period — in either direction.

## ◆ 5 FACTS WORTH KNOWING

### 1. You can collect on your spouse's record — even if you never worked.

A spouse who has little or no work history can collect up to 50% of their partner's full retirement benefit. This applies to current spouses, and in some cases to divorced spouses who were married for at least 10 years. Many eligible spouses never claim this benefit simply because they didn't know it existed.

### 2. You can undo your filing decision — once.

If you file for Social Security and regret it, you have 12 months to withdraw your application. You must repay everything you've received, but your benefit resets as if you never filed. After full retirement age, you can also suspend benefits to earn delayed credits — without repaying anything.

### 3. Working while collecting can temporarily reduce your benefit.

If you collect Social Security before your full retirement age and continue working, your benefit may be temporarily reduced if your earnings exceed certain limits. In 2026 that limit is \$22,320 per year. Once you reach full retirement age, you can earn as much as you want with no reduction.

### 4. Your benefit increases automatically with inflation.

Social Security includes a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) each year based on inflation. In recent years those increases have been significant. This is one advantage Social Security has over many private pensions and annuities — your purchasing power is protected over time.

### 5. Survivor benefits can be larger than your own.

When a spouse dies, the surviving spouse keeps the larger of the two benefits — not both. If your spouse had a significantly higher benefit, you would collect theirs instead of yours. This is why the higher earner waiting until 70 to file can be a powerful strategy for protecting a surviving spouse's long-term income.

## Your Next Step

Create or log into your free My Social Security account at [ssa.gov/myaccount](https://ssa.gov/myaccount). Review your earnings record for accuracy and check your estimated benefit at different filing ages. Errors in your earnings record can reduce your benefit — and you can request corrections.

Ready to go deeper? Our **Social Security Maximization Guide 2026** covers every filing strategy, spousal and survivor rules, tax implications, and how to get the most from the benefits you've earned.

Available at [SeniorLifeGuides.org](https://SeniorLifeGuides.org) for \$5.