

Applying for Disability Benefits with a Brain Injury

Brain injury, which is also known as traumatic brain injury or intracranial injury, is normally caused by the traumatic application of external forces to the brain. The symptoms will vary based on the location of the injury and its severity, but typical symptoms include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Vomiting
- Blurred vision
- Impaired motor skill

Some impairments may improve over time as the injury heals or rehabilitative therapy takes effect. Others will actually get worse and develop into disabling conditions such as epilepsy or mental disorders, which can prevent you from keeping gainful employment. If your brain injury has impacted your ability to work, you may be eligible to receive monthly Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits to cover your medical bills and keep your family afloat financially.

What Disability Benefits Are Available?

Social Security Disability benefits are intended for those who are unable to work due to a long-term and permanent disability. There are two primary categories, each one intended for a different type of applicant, although the medical criteria for eligibility is the same for both.

- **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):** This program pays monthly benefits to you and your dependents if you were [employed for a certain length of time](#), paid Social Security taxes, and are expected to be disabled for at least 12 months. Applicants with no work history are not likely to qualify for SSDI.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** SSI is a means-tested program that pays monthly benefits to disabled children, the elderly, and those who have limited income and assets. To qualify, you must be disabled and have an income that does not exceed the limit for your household size.

Medical Eligibility with a Brain Injury

The SSA assesses the medical eligibility of all disability applicants by using the Blue Book, its official catalog of disabling impairments. Although traumatic brain injury is not specifically listed, it is referenced under [Listing 11.18: Neurological - Adult- Cerebral Trauma](#). This section evaluates your condition to see if it fits the definition of any of the following:

- [11.02: Convulsive epilepsy](#): You must experience convulsive seizures with loss of consciousness or nighttime episodes that interfere with your ability to function during the day.
- [11.03: Non-convulsive epilepsy](#): Includes altered awareness, abnormal behavior, loss of consciousness, and problems maintaining normal daily activities.
- [11.04: Stroke](#): You must have sensory or motor problems that cause you to communicate or move with difficulty.

- [12.02: Organic mental disorder](#): Covers a change in cognitive abilities, mood, or personality that impedes your daily activities. You may also qualify if your IQ is 15 points less than before the injury.

When you apply for SSA disability benefits, you need to include medical documentation that supports the brain injury diagnosis and what the outlook is likely to be. For example:

- X-rays
- MRIs
- CT scans
- The results of neuropsychological examinations
- The results of any radiological tests such as computed tomography, which detect brain trauma
- Laboratory tests and results
- Reports from rehabilitative specialists

Your doctor will fill out a residual functional capacity (RFC) form, which will help the SSA determine how much the injury has affected your ability to perform work-related activities, such as standing, sitting, walking, lifting, hearing and talking. If you are claiming disability due to cognitive or mental impairments, the RFC should also detail your ability to understand and follow instructions and respond appropriately to supervisors, co-workers, and clients.

Receiving Benefits Without Meeting a Listing

If, for any reason, the nature or extent of your brain injury does not enable you to meet a Blue Book listing, you may still receive disability benefits. Before rejecting your application, the SSA is required to consider the effect of your injury on your ability to perform regular daily activities and to function at work. If the SSA concludes that there is no work you can be reasonably expected to do, you will be granted disability benefits via a [medical-vocational allowance](#).

For more information about qualifying for SSA disability benefits when you have experienced a traumatic brain injury, please visit the SSA website at <https://www.ssa.gov/>, go to your nearest SSA office, or call 1-800-772-1213. Regular monthly payments will ease your financial worries and let you focus on restoring quality to your life.