

Government Pension Offset



A law that affects spouses and widows or widowers

If you receive a pension from a federal, state or local government based on work where you did not pay Social Security taxes, your Social Security spouse's or widow's or widower's benefits may be reduced. This fact sheet provides answers to questions you may have about the reduction.

How much will my Social Security benefits be reduced?

Your Social Security benefits will be reduced by two-thirds of your government pension. In other words, if you get a monthly civil service pension of \$600, two-thirds of that, or \$400, must be deducted from your Social Security benefits. For example, if you are eligible for a \$500 spouse's, widow's or widower's benefit from Social Security, you will receive \$100 per month from Social Security (\$500 - \$400 = \$100).

If you take your government pension annuity in a lump sum, Social Security still will calculate the reduction as if you chose to get monthly benefit payments from your government work.

Why will my Social Security benefits be reduced?

Benefits we pay to wives, husbands, widows and widowers are "dependent's" benefits. These benefits were established in the 1930s to compensate spouses who stayed home to raise a family and who were financially dependent on the working spouse. But as it has become more common for both spouses in a married couple to work, each earned his or her own Social Security retirement benefit. The law has always required that a person's benefit as a spouse, widow or widower be offset dollar for dollar by the amount of his or her own retirement benefit.

In other words, if a woman worked and earned her own \$800 monthly Social Security retirement benefit, but she also was due a \$500 wife's benefit on her husband's Social Security record, we could not pay that wife's benefit because her own Social Security benefit offset it. But, before enactment of the Government Pension Offset provision, if that same woman was a government employee who did not pay into Social Security, and who earned an \$800 government pension, there was no offset, and we were required to pay her a full wife's benefit in addition to her government pension.

If this government employee's work had instead been subject to Social Security taxes, any Social Security benefit payable as a spouse, widow or widower would have been reduced by the person's own Social Security retirement benefit. In enacting the Government Pension Offset provision, Congress intended to ensure that when determining the amount of spousal benefit, government employees who do not pay Social Security taxes would be treated in a similar manner to those who work in the private sector and do pay Social Security taxes.

When won't my Social Security benefits be reduced?

Generally, your Social Security benefits as a spouse, widow or widower will not be reduced if you:

- Are receiving a government pension that is not based on your earnings; or
- Are a federal (including Civil Service Offset), state or local government employee whose government pension is based on a job where you were paying Social Security taxes; and
 - you filed for and were entitled to spouse's, widow's or widower's benefits before April 1, 2004; or
 - your last day of employment (that your pension is based on) is before July 1, 2004; or

(over)

—you paid Social Security taxes on your earnings during the last 60 months of government service. (Under certain conditions, fewer than 60 months may be required for people whose last day of employment falls after June 30, 2004, and before March 2, 2009.)

Also, there are other situations where Social Security benefits as a spouse, widow or widower will not be reduced; for example, if you:

- Are a federal employee who elected to switch from the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) to the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS) after December 31, 1987; and
- you filed for and were entitled to spouse's, widow's or widower's benefits before April 1, 2004; or
- your last day of service (that your pension is based on) is before July 1, 2004; or
- you paid Social Security taxes on your earnings for 60 months or more during the period beginning January 1988 and ending with the first month of entitlement to benefits; or
- Received or were eligible to receive a government pension before December 1982 and meet all the requirements for Social Security spouse's benefits in effect in January 1977; or
- Received or were eligible to receive a federal, state or local government pension before July 1, 1983, and were receiving one-half support from your spouse.

Note: A Civil Service Offset employee is a federal employee, rehired after December 31, 1983, following a break in service of more than 365 days, with five years of prior CSRS coverage.

What about Medicare?

Even if you do not receive cash benefits based on your spouse's work, you still can get Medicare at age 65 on your spouse's record if you are not eligible for it on your own record.

Can I still get Social Security benefits from my own work?

The offset applies only to Social Security benefits as a spouse or widow or widower. However, your own benefits may be reduced because of another provision of the law. For more information, ask for *Windfall Elimination Provision* (Publication No. 05-10045).

Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov or call toll-free, 1-800-772-1213 (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, 1-800-325-0778). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call during the week after Tuesday. We can provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.

