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Myths and Facts about Social Security

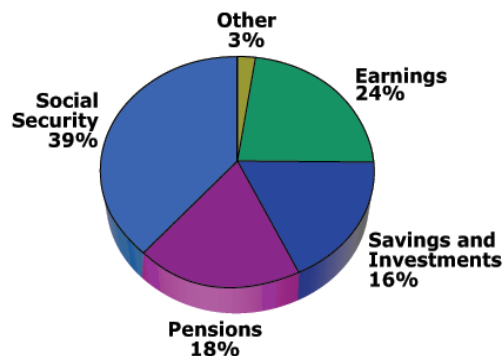
Myth: Social Security will provide most of the income you need in retirement

Fact: It's likely that Social Security will provide a smaller portion of retirement income than you expect

There's no doubt about it--Social Security is an important source of retirement income for most Americans. According to the Social Security Administration, more than nine out of ten individuals age 65 and older receive Social Security benefits.

But it may be unwise to rely too heavily on Social Security, because to keep the system solvent, some changes will have to be made to it. The younger and wealthier you are, the more likely these changes will affect you. But whether retirement is years away or just around the corner, keep in mind that Social Security was never meant to be the sole source of income for retirees. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "The system is not intended as a substitute for private savings, pension plans, and insurance protection. It is, rather, intended as the foundation upon which these other forms of protection can be soundly built."

Major Sources of Retirement Income



Source: Social Security Chartbook, 2001

No matter what the future holds for Social Security, focus on saving as much for retirement as possible. You can do so by contributing to tax-deferred vehicles such as IRAs, 401(k)s, and other employer-sponsored plans, and by investing in

stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. When combined with your future Social Security benefits, your retirement savings and pension benefits can help ensure that you'll have enough income to see you through retirement.

Myth: Social Security is only a retirement program

Fact: Social Security also offers disability and survivor's benefits

With all the focus on retirement benefits, it's easy to overlook the fact that Social Security also offers protection against long-term disability. And when you receive retirement or disability benefits, your family members may be eligible to receive benefits, too.



Another valuable source of support for your family is Social Security survivor's insurance. If you were to die, certain members of your family, including your spouse, children, and dependent parents, may be eligible for monthly survivor's benefits that can help replace lost income.

For specific information about the benefits you and your family members may receive, be sure to read your *Social Security Statement*, which you will receive every year from the Social Security Administration (SSA). You can also visit the SSA's website at www.socialsecurity.gov, or call 800-772-1213 if you have questions.

Here's a tip

Watch the mail for your Social Security Statement, which contains a personal record of the earnings on which you've paid Social Security taxes, and a summary of the estimated benefits you and your family may one day receive. You should receive your statement about three months before your birthday. When you receive it, check your earnings history, and report any errors to the SSA as soon as possible.

Myth: If you earn money after you retire, you'll lose your Social Security benefit

Fact: Money you earn after you retire will only affect your Social Security benefit if you're under full retirement age

Once you reach full retirement age (which ranges from age 65 to 67, depending on the year you were born), you can earn as much as you want without affecting your Social Security retirement benefit. But if you're under full retirement age, any income that you earn may affect the amount of benefit you receive:

- If you're under full retirement age, \$1 in benefits will be deducted for every \$2 you earn above a certain annual limit. For 2005, that limit is \$12,000.
- In the year you reach full retirement age, \$1 in benefits will be deducted for every \$3 you earn above a certain annual limit until the month you reach full retirement age. If you reach full retirement age in 2005, that limit is \$31,800.



Myth: Social Security benefits are not taxable

Fact: You may have to pay taxes on your Social Security benefits if you have other income

If the only income you had during the year was Social Security income, then your benefit generally isn't taxable. But if you earned income during the year (either from a job or from self-employment) or had substantial investment income, then you might have to pay federal income tax on a portion of your benefit. Up to 85% of your benefit may be taxable, depending on your tax filing status (e.g., single, married filing jointly) and the total amount of income you have.

Once you begin receiving Social Security benefits, you'll receive a *Social Security Benefit Statement* that shows the amount you received during the previous year. You can use this when you file your federal income taxes to find out if your benefits are subject to tax. For more information on this subject, see IRS Publication 915, *Social Security and Equivalent Railroad Retirement Benefits*.

What Is Your Full Retirement Age?	
If you were born in:	Your full retirement age is:
1937 or earlier	65
1938	65 and 2 months
1939	65 and 4 months
1940	65 and 6 months
1941	65 and 8 months
1942	65 and 10 months
1943-1954	66
1955	66 and 2 months
1956	66 and 4 months
1957	66 and 6 months
1958	66 and 8 months
1959	66 and 10 months
1960 and later	67

Note: If you were born on January 1 of any year, refer to the previous year.

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