

Social Security and Side Income: My Checklist

If you already get Social Security retirement benefits and haven't reached full retirement age, a yearly earnings limit can hold back some benefits. For a small side income the limit is usually far away – but it's worth checking once. Figures are the Social Security Administration's 2026 numbers.

Know where I stand

- ☐ I know my full retirement age. (For anyone born January 2, 1960 or later, it's 67.)
- ☐ I know which group I'm in for 2026: under full retirement age all year / reach it during 2026 / already reached it.
- ☐ If I've already reached full retirement age: there is no earnings limit. I can skip to the last section.

Check the 2026 limit

- ☐ Under full retirement age all year: the limit is **\$24,480**. Above it, \$1 is held back for every \$2 earned.
- ☐ Reaching full retirement age in 2026: the limit is **\$65,160**, counting only months before the month I reach it. Above it, \$1 is held back for every \$3.
- ☐ I've added up what counts: wages (including bonuses, commissions, vacation pay) plus my **net profit** from self-employment.
- ☐ I know what does **not** count: pensions and annuities, investment income and interest, veterans and other government or military retirement benefits.

My expected 2026 earnings that count: \$

My limit: \$

Am I under it? Yes / No

If it applies to me

- ☐ First year of retirement: I know about the special monthly rule (\$2,040 a month in 2026 if under full retirement age all year; for the self-employed, hours worked matter too).
- ☐ I understand held-back benefits aren't lost: my monthly benefit is recalculated higher at full retirement age (except spouses/survivors caring for a child).
- ☐ If my earnings will be different from what I told Social Security, I'll contact them right away.
- ☐ My earnings can also reduce benefits paid to family members on my record – I've checked.

Other benefits follow different rules

- ☐ If I get SSI or Social Security disability, I report all earnings (different rules apply).
- ☐ If I get Medicaid or housing assistance, I've checked how extra income affects them.
- ☐ For my own situation, I'll read the "How Work Affects Your Benefits" booklet at ssa.gov or contact Social Security.