

Your Social Security: Cash prizes take no toll on disability benefits

by Tom Margenau

Q: I receive Social Security disability benefits. I am a finalist in a contest where I could win \$100,000. Will I lose my disability benefits if I win all that money?

A: If you are indeed receiving SOCIAL SECURITY disability benefits, then you will keep those benefits even if you win all that money.

Social Security is considered an "entitlement" program, as opposed to a welfare program. In other words, you worked and earned your Social Security disability benefits. So you keep those benefits whether you have \$1 in the bank or \$100,000!

But many people confuse the Social Security disability program with the Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, disability program. SSI is a federal welfare program managed by the Social Security Administration. If you are receiving SSI disability benefits from SSA, then winning all that money will make you ineligible for the program. Like any welfare program, SSI is intended for people who are poor and need money. If you win \$100,000, you aren't poor and you don't need money "at least for a while anyway."

So for your sake, I hope you are getting Social Security disability benefits and I hope you win the contest!

Q: I am 67 years old and get about \$2,000 per month in Social Security retirement benefits. My wife is 61 and has been getting SSI for several years. She currently gets about \$1,100 per month. Is there some point "soon I hope" when she can start getting some of my Social Security?

A: Yes "when you die!" So I really don't think you want that to be anytime soon.

I purposely placed your question following the first one because it further illustrates the point I made about people confusing the Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, with Social Security disability benefits.

Your wife must be getting Social Security disability benefits, not SSI. The reason I know that is because SSI simply doesn't pay benefits as high as \$1,100 per month.

Because her \$1,100 monthly Social Security disability benefit is more than the maximum spousal supplement

she'd be due on your account, which is 50 percent of your rate, or \$1,000, that means she isn't eligible for a portion of your Social Security " while you're still living.

But when you die, assuming it's before she dies, then your wife could be due a widow's supplement up to 100 percent of your rate. In other words, she'd keep getting her \$1,100 per month disability benefit but would also start getting \$900 in widow's benefits to take her up to your \$2,000 rate.

Q: Can older people get SSI, or is it just a Social Security disability supplement?

A: As I alluded to in the prior two answers, SSI is not a Social Security supplement. SSI is a separate and distinct government program that has nothing to do with Social Security other than the fact that it happens to be run by the Social Security Administration.

And, yes, older people can get Supplemental Security Income. SSI is a federal welfare program that pays monthly benefits to the elderly poor, folks 65 and older, and to poor people under 65 who are disabled.

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