

Tips on Obtaining Disability Benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA)

The Foundation thanks Linda Dorfner Charles, BSN, RN, for authoring this Patient Education Sheet. Charles assisted the Sjögren's Foundation in its long-time and successful advocacy for a specific federal disability listing for Sjögren's.

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- **Know that documentation is key to winning your case!** Keep a journal of your symptoms and copies of all records from lab tests, doctors' visits, and hospitalizations.
- **Review your medical records to ensure legibility and completeness.**
- **Submit documentation in order of occurrence.** Show disease progression and resulting limitations, including side effects of all current medications.
- **Have your doctor highlight the fact that Sjögren's symptoms can unpredictably wax and wane,** as SSA forms are not tailored to these features.
- **If applicable, state that during a flare-up you are unable to perform specific activities.** Include basic self-care or activities of daily living (ADLs) such as eating, walking, bathing, lifting, shopping, cooking, reading, driving, working, and household chores.
- **Document what it takes for you to get through every hour of a 24-hour day.** Include what you must do to alleviate symptoms, e.g. every time you use eye drops. State how each symptom affects you (frequency and duration), e.g. how often you are fatigued and what it prevents you from doing. Don't worry about sounding repetitive.
- **Cite the impact of your combined symptoms on your function and productivity,** including lost work days, job status, depression, and loss of relationships and social interactions. While one symptom alone might not be considered disabling, the combination of symptoms can be disabling.
- **Describe the overall impact of Sjögren's on you and your family's lives.** Don't forget loss of income and high treatment costs (drugs, OTC products, medical co-pays, frequent doctor visits, psycho-therapy, and physical therapy).
- **Explain the negative impact of the workplace on your physical well-being.** For example, dry air, fluorescent lighting, and computers aggravate dry eye and travel, and sleep deprivation worsen fatigue, joint pain, digestive symptoms, and the ability to concentrate.
- **Use educational materials to help your case.** Visit the Sjögren's Foundation web site or contact the Foundation for helpful materials.
- **Read SSA disability guidelines for Sjögren's.** The fact that the SSA now includes specific guidelines for Sjögren's will help your claim. Go to www.ssa.gov and enter "Immune System" in the Search feature to bring up the Immune System Disorders Guidelines.
- **Don't let rejection discourage you!** Applicants often are rejected for benefits the first time they apply.
- **Consider hiring an attorney who specializes in Social Security Disability** to help with documentation and to expedite your approval for disability.

For more information on Sjögren's, visit the Foundation website at www.sjogrens.org, call 301-530-4420, email info@sjogrens.org, or write to the Sjögren's Foundation, 10701 Parkridge Blvd, Ste 170, Reston, VA 20191

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