

What to Expect at the Hearing

1. Your hearing is before an Administrative Law Judge who hears Social Security cases. Social Security will not be represented by a lawyer. There will be no jury or spectators at the hearing. This is a hearing, not a trial. This is not like Perry Mason or any TV show you watch. The only people there will be your representative, the Judge, the Judge's hearing assistant, you and any witnesses or friends you bring with you.
2. The Judge may also request either a medical expert (doctor) and/or a vocational expert to testify at your hearing. The medical expert reviews your medical records in your case and provides testimony on how it compares to Social Security's medical rules and his/her opinion of your limitations. The vocational expert is an individual who works helping disabled people return to the workplace. He/she testifies on what kind of work, if any, could be done by you with different types of limitations.
3. The hearing usually is in a room with a long table. You will sit at one end and the Judge sits at a desk at the other end. Your representative will sit next to you on the left and if a doctor and/or a vocational expert are present, they will sit on your right. The hearing assistant sits next to the judge.
4. We enter the room and take our seats. The hearing begins with the Judge asking the representative some questions and will then ask you to raise your right hand and swear to tell the truth. After this, the Judge will start asking you questions. After the Judge has finished his questioning, then your representative will ask questions that the Judge did not cover. After you have finished testifying, the Judge will ask the medical expert questions and the representative may cross-examine the medical expert. Then, the Judge will ask the vocational expert questions and the representative may cross-examine the vocational expert. Usually after this, the Judge will make a statement such that he/she will review all the evidence and testimony and will send you a written decision. Hearings usually last about one hour.
5. The Judge will probably not announce a decision at the hearing. Normally, the decision will come in the mail one to three months after the hearing date. Occasionally, some judges take longer to issue a decision. The Judge's office will mail the original to you and a copy to our office.
6. Do not dress up for your hearing. Wear what you wear on an average day. We want the Judge to see you as you normally look every day around the house. Usually people who do not feel well dress very comfortably. Do not wear excessive jewelry or wigs. Do not wear a hat into the hearing. Do not chew gum or have anything in your mouth during the hearing.
7. On the day of your hearing, take your medicine as you normally do. Do not double up on your medications no matter how much pain you are in or how nervous you are, unless your doctor tells you to do so.
8. If you want to bring a relative or friends with you to the hearing, you may do so. There is a possibility that your friend or relative may go into the hearing with you. Some Judges allow spectators in the hearing and some do not. It also depends if there is adequate seating in the hearing room. If the friend or relative is allowed in, you should tell him/her not to answer questions for you when you testify. Even if you cannot remember or answer incorrectly, he/she should not interrupt.