

Chronic Pain and Social Security Disability

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is required to consider pain and the limitations imposed by pain in the adjudication of a disability claim. However, before pain may be considered, a medically determinable severe impairment must be established by medically acceptable clinical and/or laboratory diagnostic testing. Once a medically determinable severe impairment is established, then the established impairment must reasonably be expected to produce the pain.

The intensity, persistence and functionally limiting effects of the pain, (i.e., how does the pain affect the individual's ability to do basic work activities) are evaluated. Because symptoms, such as pain, sometime suggest a greater severity of impairment than can be shown by objective medical evidence alone, the individual's statements about his/her pain with the rest of the relevant evidence in the case record are carefully considered. An individual's statement about the intensity and persistence of pain or about the effect the pain has on his/her ability to work may not be disregarded solely because they are not substantiated by objective medical evidence.

The following factors are considered in the assessment of pain in the individual's daily activities:

- The location, duration, frequency and intensity of the individual's pain (or other symptoms)
- Factors that precipitate and aggravate the symptoms
- The type, dosage, effectiveness and side effects of any medication the individual takes or has taken to alleviate pain (or other symptoms)

- Treatment, other than medication, the individual receives or has received for relief of pain (or other symptoms)
- Any measures, other than treatment, the individual uses or has used to relieve pain (or other symptoms) (e.g., lying flat on his/her back, standing for 15 to 20 minutes every hour or sleeping on a board)
- Any other factors concerning the individual's functional limitations and restrictions due to pain (or other symptoms)

In addition, age, education, past relevant work experience and limitations of physical/mental condition are reviewed to determine if an individual may still qualify for disability benefits even if some or all of the criteria of the medical condition do not meet/equal an impairment listing.

Source: Social Security Administration | www.ssa.gov



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