Migraines and Applying for Disability Benefits

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Disability Benefits for Migraine

As someone who is fortunate enough to only suffer from Acute Migraine Syndrome as opposed to chronic migraines, I often find myself wondering how the other side is able to function when having to balance school, family, social life, and above all else, work, while constantly enduring migraines with debilitating symptoms.

I know from experience that as soon as a migraine sets in, I'm down and out for the next 8 hours at least. Thankfully, my migraines don't occur as regularly as those of chronic migraine sufferers, so I can only begin to imagine how much of a challenge life must be when faced with that kind of debilitating pain on a regular basis.

Vision loss, vomiting, nausea, numbness, and speech impairment are just a few of the symptoms migraine sufferers experience, and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), migraines make the list for the one of the top 20 disabling conditions in the world. With that knowledge, applying for disability benefits may be something to consider if you're a chronic migraine sufferer who is unable to work regularly.

Getting Started

Functioning on a daily basis becomes a nearly impossible challenge for those who experience regular, severe migraine headaches and often those sufferers can't do much else than stay in a dark room for hours – or days – at a time.

If you're thinking about applying for Social Security disability benefits, here are some of the things the Social Security Administration (SSA) will look at to determine if your migraines are considered to be a disability.

What They're Looking For

Medical Records

In order to be approved for disability benefits for chronic migraines, it's important that you've obtained consistent treatment, as SSA is mostly interested in unbiased medical evidence from a medical professional.

Although there is no diagnostic test for migraines, you will have to provide evidence stating that you have been diagnosed with recurrent migraines. Additional tests run by your doctor, such as CT scans or MRIs, should also be provided to SSA when applying for disability benefits.

Additional things SSA will be looking for in your medical file include tests conducted to rule out other possible conditions, list of medications or treatments and their results, records from migraine-related hospital visits, and doctors' notes outlining the intensity and frequency of your migraine headaches.

Next page: where to apply and additional factors for consideration.

What They’re Looking For

Limitations

While it is possible to be approved for disability based on a chronic migraine diagnosis, the SSA doesn’t set forth specific guidelines that need to be met in order to qualify. This produces a unique challenge for migraine sufferers. To be considered for approval, you must prove that your migraines impact your level of functioning to the point that you are unable to complete normal work tasks on a regular basis.

In order to be deemed as unable to work, you must experience significant difficulties in areas like concentration, understanding instructions, lifting, walking, standing, and dealing with people. In addition, the SSA will take into consideration the frequency of your migraines and how often you have previously missed work due to your migraine condition. If you have previous injuries or other conditions that may further limit your ability to work, the SSA will also take those into consideration when determining your eligibility.

Additional Factors

SSA will also consider your age, level of education, and past employment experience in addition to other limitations caused by your migraines to determine if there is another kind of job you could do successfully before making a disability determination. Generally, if you have little education, history of generalized work, and are over the age of 50, you have a better chance of being approved.

Attempts at Treatment

Before being considered for disability benefits, SSA will want to know that you’ve exercised all possible forms of medication and other treatments possible to manage your migraine condition.

Treatments such as pain medication, anti-depressants, preventatives, and anti-nausea medications are all forms of treatment to include in your list to SSA. Additional forms of treatment, including alternative treatments like acupuncture and massage, should also be outlined.

Where Do I Apply?

If you meet the majority of the criteria outlined above, there’s a good chance you can receive approval for disability benefits through SSA. Be as thorough and honest as possible when providing information, and be prepared for a claims examiner to call you for a phone interview or ask your doctor to fill out a questionnaire if they feel it is necessary.

You can apply for Social Security disability benefits by visiting your local Social Security office, calling the SSA at (800) 772-1213, or visiting their website (www.ssa.gov). Upon submission of your application, your claim will be provided to your state’s Disability Determination Services, where a claims examiner will critically review your file, investigate your case, and finally, make the determination on whether to approve or deny your claim.