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There are four stages for SSDI and SSI applications: Initial, Reconsideration, Hearing, and Appeals Council. These steps are the same for both SSI and SSDI applicants.

Stage #1: Initial

When your first apply for disability benefits, you complete an Initial application. This can be filed at your local Social Security office, over the phone or online. Rarely, your application will be approved at the Initial stage. More likely, your application will be denied and three options remain: do nothing, file a new Initial claim, or file a Request for Reconsideration (recommended).

Stage #2: Request for Reconsideration

If your Initial application is denied, you have 60 days from the date of denial to file a Request for Reconsideration (Recon). At this stage, your claim is reviewed again by Social Security. If your Recon claim is approved, you will receive disability benefits. If not, three options remain: do nothing, file a new Initial claim, or file a Request for Hearing (recommended).

Stage #3: Hearing

When your Request for Reconsideration is denied, you again have 60 days from the date of your most recent denial to file a Request for Hearing. You have the greatest chance of being approved at this stage. The hearing takes place before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) and claimants will receive a Notice of Hearing approximately 30 days before the hearing date. The hearing usually takes place at your local Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR). While legal representation is not required for the hearing, it is highly recommended. A qualified disability attorney/advocate can present and defend your case in the most favorable manner. Going to a hearing without adequate representation is not a good idea.

Step #4: Appeals Council

You will usually receive a decision from the ALJ within a few months after your hearing. If your claim is approved you will receive both a Notice of Decision and a Notice of Award. If your claim is denied, you can appeal the decision before the [Appeals Council](#) ^[2]. However, the Appeals Council frequently upholds the decision of the ALJ. At this point, you may wish to seek the assistance of a qualified disability attorney/advocate and file a new Initial claim.