

WHAT WILL I TESTIFY ABOUT AT THE HEARING?

The purpose of your testimony at the hearing is to supplement and corroborate the medical records and reports that are a part of the hearing file in your case. Although adequate medical evidence forms the foundation of a successful case, your testimony is crucially important to show how your medical condition limits your ability to do jobs available in the national economy in light of your age, education and training, and work experience. The administrative law judge will evaluate your answers to questions in several areas, including those described in the next several paragraphs. The precise questions you will need to answer will depend on the nature of your disability.

☞ MEDICAL CONDITION

You will be asked how your medical condition makes you feel. In other words, you will describe the symptoms you experience such as pain, numbness, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, shortness of breath, and so forth, as precisely as you can. For example, if your case involves pain, you might be asked what started the pain in the first place. Where is the pain in your body? How much pain do you have and how often? Does it vary in intensity? What kind of pain do you have - is it burning, stabbing, crushing, sharp, throbbing, radiating or aching pain? Does the pain limit your range of motion? Does the pain interfere with your ability to concentrate? How much does the pain interfere with your daily activities? What makes the pain worse? Does movement, activity, staying in one position, environmental conditions or stress affect the pain? What makes the pain better? What medication do you take for pain? How well does the medication work? Are there any side effects from the pain medication? What treatment other than medication have you tried? Do you use any home remedies? Has the pain changed over time? Is it worsening, getting better or staying the same?

☞ MEDICAL HISTORY

You may be asked how often you see your doctor, what sort of treatment your doctor provides, including what medications your doctor has prescribed. You may also be asked to describe the symptoms and treatment of your medical condition since its onset. Although you may be asked what your doctor has told you about your impairment, you will not be expected to testify about the technical medical aspects of your disease or the results of medical tests. Your representative will see to it that available medical documentation is in your hearing file.

☞ PHYSICAL ABILITIES

You will be asked to tell how far you can walk before resting, how long you can sit at one time and stand at one time, the total length of time you can sit and stand during an eight-hour day; how much you can lift constantly, frequently or occasionally; whether you can use your hands for repetitive actions such as simple grasping, reaching, pushing and pulling of arm controls and for fine manipulation; whether you can use your feet for repetitive movements such as pushing and pulling of leg controls; whether you can twist, bend, squat, crawl, and climb. You may also be asked whether you have any other restrictions on activities caused by allergies, dizziness, drowsiness or special sensitivity to marked changes in temperature and humidity.

☞ MENTAL ABILITIES

If your case involves a mental disability, you will be asked about your ability to understand, carry out and remember instructions, to make judgments, to respond appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations, and how well you deal with changes in a routine work setting.

☞ EDUCATION AND TRAINING

You will be asked how far you went in school, whether you have had any training in the military, whether you have had any formal vocational training, and whether you have had any on-the-job training. You will be asked to describe any vocational training you have had in recent years.

☞ WORK EXPERIENCE

You may be asked to describe job duties on your last job and on significant jobs you have had during the past 15 years. The judge will want to know what percentage of the time you spent sitting, standing and walking and how much weight you had to lift on each former job. The judge will assess the level of skill required to do your former jobs. You may be asked why you left each former job.

☞ DAILY ACTIVITIES

To assess the limitations caused by your disability in your daily life, you will be asked questions about your daily activities - how you spend your time from getting up in the morning until going to bed at night. You will be asked how well you usually sleep; whether you take naps during the day; whether your appetite is good; what things you do around the house, such as cooking, housework, repairs or gardening; whether you go shopping; whether you drive a car or use public transportation; and whether you pay bills. You will be asked how often you visit relatives or friends; whether you play games, participate in organizations, or attend religious services; and what hobbies you have now. You will be asked how much television you watch and whether you read the newspaper.

You may be asked how your daily routine has changed since you became disabled. For example, what hobbies did you have before you became disabled that you are now unable to do?