Your Doctor's Opinion Can Make or Break Your Disability Case—Here's Why

1. **SSA Doctors Never Meet You**

The Social Security Administration always **relies on non-examining medical consultants to review your treating doctor's records** and determine whether you are disabled. Because these consultants never meet or examine you, it's easy for them to misinterpret your doctor's findings or overlook important details in your medical records.

2. **SSA's doctors are paid by SSA**

Most of the time, the SSA doctor has no expertise in the relevant specialty — for example, a gynecologist opining on a rheumatoid arthritis claim.

3. **SSA is required to consider and address all treating doctors' opinions.**

SSR 96-8p requires that if the ALJ's determination conflicts with your doctor's medical opinion, the ALJ must explain — on the record — why that opinion was not adopted.

4. **Objective Tests Aren't Enough**

MRIs, lab tests, and x-rays don't tell SSA how your condition limits your ability to function. Only your doctor can explain how your symptoms affect your work capacity.

5. **Judges Expect a Medical Source Statement**

ALJs are less likely to grant benefits without a completed RFC (Residual Functional Capacity) from your doctor describing specific limitations (e.g., how long you can sit, stand, lift or concentrate).

6. **Only Doctors Can Explain Fluctuating Symptoms**

Conditions like lupus, fibromyalgia, migraines, IBS, seizure or mental illness fluctuate. A doctor can explain how these ups and downs make full-time work impossible.

7. **Your Doctor Can Confirm the Side Effects of Medications**

Fatigue, dizziness, and concentration problems caused by medications can be disabling, but SSA won't consider them unless your doctor connects those effects to your treatment.

8. **You Need Support for "Less Than Sedentary" Findings**

The strongest disability cases are those where a doctor supports that you can't even do sedentary work. This is key to winning benefits, especially under age 50.

9. **Winning an Appeal**

Some judges are skeptical of certain disabilities, and treatments (like pain management) which can make approvals more difficult. However, we are successful on appeal in the vast majority of cases where we have a medical source statement detailing the information SSA is looking for when we have a medical source statement from a treating physician.

10. Your treating doctor cannot simply state that you are unable to work.

Under Social Security regulations, 20 C.F.R. § 404.1520b(c)(3)(i), statements from your doctor that you are or are not "disabled, blind, able to work, or able to perform regular or continuing work" are considered "**inherently neither valuable nor persuasive**" — meaning SSA will not provide any explanation of how such a statement was weighed in the decision. Instead, SSA requires medical opinions that describe your specific functional limitations — such as how long you can sit, stand, walk, or lift — so the judge can make the disability determination.