

Feature Important reminder: Applying for your benefits

You've worked long and hard to build up your nest egg but, as retirement draws closer, how do you go about ensuring you get quick and easy access to your benefits?

Here is a simple checklist to make the process as smooth as possible:

1. Check with your employer or RPMI to find out if you are eligible to start taking your benefits. Factors may include age, length of service or benefits amount.
2. Plan well in advance so you get your benefits when you want them.
3. Around 12 weeks before benefits become payable, ask your employer for an estimate.
4. Around eight weeks before, complete an 'Application for benefits' form with your chosen retirement options, and ask your employer to complete your salary information and authorise the form.
5. About six weeks before retirement, your employer will send the form to RPMI.

The next step

RPMI processes your application to ensure that any lump sum is paid early in retirement, and your pension will normally be paid in the next available payroll after that date. You should receive a letter confirming these details prior to retirement.

Types of retirement

Depending on circumstances, you may be eligible for:

Normal retirement

This applies to anyone taking payment of their benefits on or after their normal pension age. If a member leaves employment on or after this age, they can start receiving their benefits (without them being reduced). The latest you can take payment of your benefits from active service depends on your particular section of the Railways Pension Scheme.

Early retirement

This applies to anyone with the right to take payment of their benefits **before** they reach their normal pension age. If you opt for early retirement, your benefits will be reduced to take into account the fact that your pension is being paid early.

Ill health retirement

Any member who is unable to carry out their current job or any other suitable job (other than temporarily) because of ill health (physical or mental) may be eligible for this type of retirement.

Strict criteria govern the payment of ill health pensions, which are stated in the rules and on the Application for Incapacity Benefits form. You must also have at least five years' membership in your section of the Railways Pension Scheme.

Taking benefits while remaining in service

This type of retirement (which was introduced on 6 April 2006) is entirely at your employer's discretion. If granted, you may claim your benefits but continue working for your employer.

These benefits can only be paid if your employer agrees, and you are aged 55 or over. Your benefits may be reduced by more than they would be if you were leaving employment.