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Applying the Grid Rules in a Spinal Stenosis Disability Case

If you suffer from a chronic, painful physical condition and you are pursuing a Social Security Disability claim based on it, there is a particular strategy you can use to win your claim if you are over the age of 50. This strategy involves using Social Security's "Grid Rules" to qualify for disability. Many people have questions about what the Grid Rules are and how they work. The following is a discussion of the Grid Rules and how they can be applied in a Spinal Stenosis disability case.

When you apply for Social Security Disability (SSDI) benefits, there are different strategies that can be utilized to ensure a favorable outcome – no matter what your particular illness is. One of these strategies is the use of Social Security's "Grid Rules." The purpose of the Grid Rules is to provide medical-vocational guidelines in order to focus more on the age, education, and work background of the individual in relation to how the disease at hand impacts and limits one's capacity to function in daily life, both at home and at work.

The Grid Rules differentiate one's physical capacity to work into three different categories: sedentary, light and medium. Restrictions for lifting, sitting, and standing placed by one's physician give credence to one's claim of limited functional capacity. The degree of limitation is determined by the Grid Rules.

There are some limitations to the use of Grid Rules. The Grid Rules generally apply to those who are age 50 and older. For those who are below the age of 50, a partially favorable decision can be awarded based on the Grid Rules. In addition, medical conditions that limit one's physical capacity to work qualify under the Grid Rules; mental health problems do not qualify for awarding benefits under the Grid Rules.

For example, spinal stenosis is a medical condition that limits one's physical capacity to function in daily life. Spinal stenosis consists of narrowing of the areas within the spine. These narrowings create pressure on the spinal cord and/or nerves that branch off of the spinal column, creating severe pain. Additional symptoms associated with spinal stenosis include leg cramping, radiating back and hip pain, neck and shoulder pain, loss of balance, and loss of bowel and/or bladder function. Spinal stenosis can eventually lead to loss of feeling in the extremities, muscle atrophy and other degenerative changes. While there are conservative measures that can be taken to treat spinal stenosis, these are sometimes the only measures that are available, as all sufferers are not candidates for surgery.

When applying the Grid Rules to a case where the claimant's spinal stenosis symptoms interfere with his or her physical capacity to work, the age, education and previous work experience are considered. The following are combinations of these three criteria which may qualify a claimant for disability benefits as set forth by the Grid Rules:

Grid Rule	Age	Education	Work Experience
201.01 (Sedentary)	55+	Limited/less	Unskilled/none
201.02 (Sedentary)	55+	Limited/less	Skilled/semi-skilled (non-transferable skills)
201.04 (Sedentary)	55+	High School graduate or more	Unskilled/none
201.06 (Sedentary)	55+	High School Graduate or more	Skilled/semi-skilled (non-transferable skill)
201.09 (Sedentary)	50-54	Limited/less	Unskilled/none
201.10 (Sedentary)	50-54	Limited/Less	Skilled/semi-skilled (non-transferable skill)
201.12 (Sedentary)	50-54	High School graduate or more	Unskilled/none
201.14 (Sedentary)	50-54	High School Graduate or more	Skilled/semi-skilled (non-transferable skill)
201.17 (Sedentary)	45-49	Illiterate/unable to communicate in English	Unskilled/non
202.01 (Light)	55+	Limited/less	Unskilled/none
202.02 (Light)	55+	Limited/less	Skilled/semi-skilled (non-transferable skill)
202.04 (Light)	55+	High School Graduate or more	Unskilled/none
202.06 (Light)	55+	High School Graduate or more	Skilled/semi-skilled (non-transferable skill)
202.09 (Light)	50-54	Illiterate/unable to communicate in English	Unskilled/none
203.01 (Medium)	60-64	Marginal/none	Unskilled/none
203.02 (Medium)	60-64	Limited/less	None

Remember that medical records and employment records are important documents to present as evidence when making your case for qualifying under the Grid Rules. The medical records will show, from your physician's expert perspective, what your

fundamental physical limitations are based on your disease process and his examinations, as well as the treatments of the disease and their effect on your ability to work. The employment records will show how these physical limitations translate into the inability to perform the work based on the job description and the qualifications necessary to perform the job, including lifting, sitting and standing requirements.