

## Ask a Lawyer

By Steven Leskin

**Q~**My application for Social Security Benefits was denied. What should I do?

**A~**The application process to receive Social Security benefits can be long and arduous. There are several layers of appeals. If your claim is initially denied, you file for "Reconsideration." Following Reconsideration, a claimant goes before a federal administrative judge. If you are unsuccessful before the judge, your claim goes to the Appeals Council in Falls Church, Virginia. After that, your denied application goes to the federal circuit courts.

You need to be sure that all of your medical and vocational evidence is submitted before you get to the hearing level. You need to confirm that your record is current and complete. Social Security will only make a decision based on the evidence in your file. If it's not there- no matter how important- it will not be considered.

The other important thing to do is to keep appealing. Do not abandon

your application and start the process over later. It is almost always better to keep appealing a denied application, than to file and start over. There can be negative legal consequences to filing multiple new applications.

Finally, be sure to send Social Security everything it requests. Be sure to follow their deadlines. Failure to do either of these very well may result in your claim being denied.

**Q~**My husband and I do not have any property. We do not have kids. Can we do our divorce ourselves?

**A~**Yes. The courts have become accustomed to litigants representing themselves in divorce cases. You can download the forms from the state, complete and file them with the court yourself.

Having said that, the state forms are terrible, you will not know what mistakes you have made until it's too late, and often the cost of fixing the mistake is more expensive, if it's actually possible to fix, than having spent the money up front for an attorney.

At the very minimum, you should consider consulting with an attorney. You may have valuable rights of which you are not aware. Also, if you are giving up too much to a spouse just to be done with the marriage, you should consider speaking to someone about what the long term financial impact will be on you.

**Q~**I was at a stop light and was rear ended. The insurance company is offering me money to settle. Should I accept their offer?

**A~**Insurance companies and personal injury attorneys value injuries based on what a jury might award as a verdict based on the same circumstances. It is a certainty that the insurance company is not offering you more than that estimated value. The question is how much less than that number are they offering and can you live with that.

Correctly valuing a case is an art. It takes years of experience to get a feel for what a jury might do. What county you are in makes a difference.

The damage to the cars make a difference. The quality of medical care you receive makes a difference. There are a lot of factors which go into estimating what a jury might do with your case.

Another set of factors for you to consider is the time and expense of not accepting the insurance company offer. If you do not, you will have no option but to file a lawsuit against the adverse driver. Even with attorneys who accept cases on a contingent basis- meaning they do not collect a fee unless you win- you may still be responsible to pay costs. And costs, usually start about \$2,000 for a typical lawsuit. That means you must be pretty confident that a jury will award you at least \$2000. And, finally, it usually takes about one year for a case to work its way through the courts and get to trial.

*Steven Leskin is an attorney in North Portland. He has been in practice since 1992. You can submit questions to him through [www.StevenLeskin.com](http://www.StevenLeskin.com) or through the *Vernonia's Voice* website.*

## Creature Comforts: My Dog Acts Like a Cow!

By Michal Smith

If your dog is only eating grass, you should consider yourself lucky. While it isn't surprising that a dog can eat all kinds of vile, disgusting things, it may be surprising to learn why they do. To understand these behaviors, we need to go back thousands of years, long before dogs were domesticated, when they roamed the countryside in packs, hunting their food, as referenced from an article published out of American Animal

Hospital Association: "Dogs and Grass Eating"

Wild dogs ate their food on the run. They hunted all kinds of animals, and ate the whole of the animal, except for things like the skin. They ate the major organs, the muscles and even the bones, all to get the nutrients they needed to be healthy and strong. They didn't have the easy life of most dogs today. Most of the prey they subsisted on were herbivores. While a dog's digestive system is strong, it does need vegetable matter to help digest meat proteins, especially those in the raw meat it was eating. They ate the vital organs first; the stomach and intestines of the animals they were eating were full of partially digested vegetable matter.

Even though their digestive processes remain the same, you need to carefully review what your dog is eating to ensure they are getting a well-balanced diet. Without a proper balance of nutrients, a dog will develop all kinds of health problems, just like their human masters.

Your dog can be fed vegetables, but they need to be cooked so they can be properly digested. Feeding

them dark greens, like broccoli, can help curb their liking for eating grass. Just because your dog gets vegetables in their kibble, it may not stop them from eating grass. Here are some important tips that you need to know when it comes to dogs and grass.

First off, even biologists and veterinarians aren't completely sure why dogs eat grass. There are a lot of theories, but the jury is still out. Take a look at some of the latest theories online, as well as dozens of suggestions for breaking the animal of the habit.

Whatever the reason, if your dog won't stop eating grass, you should make sure they are not eating manicured lawns containing harmful fertilizers and pesticides. You can control this in a few different ways. One, you can consider dog 'friendly' grass: grow some grass at home that doesn't have any added chemicals and be sure your dog has regular access to his special grass patch. Don't walk your dog on grass that is newly manicured or recently treated with chemicals. Usually these substances break down within a few days; after that they are safe.

Sometimes dogs will eat grass to make themselves throw up. If your pet does this on a regular basis, it may be a sign that they have a more serious problem. Have your vet check the pup, just to be sure there's nothing seriously wrong. Most vets say that eating a certain amount of grass isn't harmful for your dog, and can actually help their digestive processes.

Creatures carries several digestion aids for dogs to help curb their need for actual grass eating from chews to powders to pastes. Open Mon-Fri 10-6; Sat 10-5; Sun 12-4; 503-429-PETS (7387).

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