

# VA Disability Compensation

*A step-by-step guide to deciding whether disability compensation may apply, preparing your claim, filing, and following through.*

## 1 | Could you be eligible?

- VA disability compensation may apply if you have a current physical or mental health condition and it is connected to your military service.
- A condition may have started during service, been caused by an in-service event or exposure, or been made worse by service. Other rules apply to secondary, presumptive, and increased-rating claims.

[CHECK VA DISABILITY ELIGIBILITY →](#)

## 2 | Decide what type of claim you may have

- Original claim: a condition you have not previously claimed.
- Increased claim: a service-connected condition has worsened.
- Secondary claim: a new condition caused or worsened by a service-connected disability.
- Presumptive claim: VA presumes certain conditions are related to qualifying service or exposures when the rules are met.

[SEE VA CLAIM TYPES AND EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS →](#)

## 3 | If you plan to file, protect your potential effective date

### DO THIS BEFORE SPENDING WEEKS GATHERING RECORDS

If you plan to file online, starting the online disability application can establish your potential date of claim if you complete it within 365 days. If you plan to file by paper and need time to gather evidence, consider VA Form 21-0966, Intent to File.

[START AN ONLINE DISABILITY APPLICATION →](#)

[SUBMIT / DOWNLOAD VA FORM 21-0966 - INTENT TO FILE →](#)

## 4 | Gather the evidence you already have

- DD214 or other separation records.
- Relevant service treatment or personnel records you possess.
- VA and private medical records relevant to the condition.
- Statements from you or others when they help explain symptoms, events, or impact.
- Information about dependents if relevant to your benefits.

### YOU DO NOT NEED A “PERFECT” FILE BEFORE YOU START

VA says you may submit supporting evidence after filing. Focus on identifying the conditions you are claiming and providing the evidence you already have or can reasonably obtain.

## 5 | Decide whether you want help

[FIND YOUR STATE VETERANS AGENCY →](#)



A strong first stop for free state/local veterans-benefits assistance and referrals.

## 6 | File your claim

[FILE VA FORM 21-526EZ ONLINE →](#)

[DOWNLOAD VA FORM 21-526EZ →](#)

VA also accepts claims by mail, in person, and by fax as described on its filing page.

## 7 | After you file

- Save a copy of what you submitted and your confirmation.
- Watch for VA letters, calls, or requests for information.
- Attend any C&P exam VA schedules, or promptly contact VA if you must reschedule.
- Submit requested evidence promptly.
- Track your claim online.

### IF VA SCHEDULES A C&P EXAM

Be ready to describe the condition accurately: when it began, current symptoms, treatment, and how it affects daily life or work. A C&P exam helps VA evaluate the claim; it is not a treatment visit.

[TRACK YOUR VA CLAIM →](#)

[WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU FILE →](#)

## 8 | When the decision arrives

- Read the entire decision letter - not just the percentage.
- Check each claimed condition, effective date, and VA's explanation of the evidence.
- If you disagree, review the decision-review options before filing something new.

[REVIEW YOUR DECISION-REVIEW OPTIONS →](#)