

Filing a Disability Claim: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



There are multiple steps in the disability claim process. Following these FAQs may help guide you in filing a VA claim and provide answers to commonly asked questions regarding eligibility, the process, exams, and more.

1. What documents (or evidence) will I need to support my claim?

When you file a VA disability claim, you will need to submit, or give us permission to gather evidence to support that your claimed condition is associated with an in-service event or injury or that show your rated disability has gotten worse. Evidence could include:

- VA medical and/or hospital records that relate to your claimed condition or that show your rated disability has gotten worse.
- Private medical and/or hospital records that relate to your claimed condition or that show your rated disability has gotten worse.
- Supporting statements from family, friends, coworkers, clergy, or law enforcement personnel with knowledge about how and when your disability happened or how it got worse.

You should also submit your [DD214 or other separation documents](#). As needed, VA will assist with obtaining relevant records, which includes verification of your service.

2. How do I submit evidence for my claim?

Once you file a claim for disability compensation, you may upload more evidence to support your claim online or mail into the [Claims Intake Center](#). Evidence may include supporting documents like medical test results, doctor's reports and other records. You can upload evidence to support that claim using our [claim status tool](#). To learn more about uploading evidence, visit www.va.gov/disability/upload-supporting-evidence/. You are encouraged to submit the evidence as soon as you can. If you do not provide any evidence or the information VA needs to help obtain the evidence within 30 days, VA may make a decision on your claim. Contact VA at 800-827-1000 if you have any questions or concerns regarding evidence for your claim.

3. Should I submit an intent to file form?

If you plan to file your claim using a paper form, but do not have all of your evidence ready to submit with your claim, you may first want to submit an [intent to file](#). This form serves as a place holder, giving you time to gather evidence while holding a potential start date (also called an effective date). Your effective date is the day VA determines your service-connected benefits begin. The assigned effective date impacts the amount of retroactive compensation you may receive. When VA receives your intent to file, you may be able to get a retroactive payment (compensation that starts at a point in the past) back to that date. You have one year from the date you send in your intent to file to submit your claim. If a claim is not received within one year, the intent to file expires.

If you file for disability compensation online, you do not need to notify VA of your intent to file. Your intent to file automatically sets on the date you start filling out your claim online. Your online application needs to be completed within one year to hold the intent to file date.

4. What type of disability claim should I file?

Depending on your situation, you could file the following disability claims:

- **In-service disability claims** - This applies if you got sick or injured while serving in the military and have a current condition associated with your in-service illness or injury.
- **Aggravated disability claims** - This applies if you had an illness or injury before you joined the military and serving made it worse.
- **Post-service and presumptive disability claims** – This applies if you have a disability related to your active-duty service that didn't appear until after you ended your service.
- **Increased claims** – This applies if you are already service-connected for a disability and it has gotten worse.
- **Secondary service-connected claims** – This applies if you have a disability that is related to a condition that is already service-connected.

5. How long does it take VA to make a decision?

Up-to-date information about the average days it takes to complete a disability-related claim may be found on [VA.gov](#). While waiting for a decision, you do not need to do anything, unless VA sends you a letter asking for more information. If VA schedules an exam(s) for you, it's important not to miss your scheduled exam. If you do not show up to your appointment, it may also delay your claim, or your claim may be decided based on the evidence you provided.

6. Can I check my claims or appeal status online?

Yes. You can check the status of a claim or appeal anytime online at www.va.gov/claim-or-appeal-status/.

If you do not have access to the internet, you may contact VA at 800-827-1000, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST.

7. How does VA assign disability ratings?

A disability rating percentage is assigned based on the severity of your service-connected condition. The disability rating percentage determines how much disability compensation you may receive each month. It also impacts your eligibility for other VA benefits.

If VA grants more than one condition, you will have multiple disability rating percentages. VA then uses the individually assigned rated percentages to calculate your combined VA disability rating. Calculating your combined disability rating involves more than adding up the individual rating percentages. Your combined rating percentage may be different from the sum of your individual rating percentages. To learn more about disability ratings or to calculate your combined disability rating, visit www.va.gov/disability/about-disability-ratings/.

8. Will I need to report to a VA claims exam?

After you file your disability benefits claim, VA may ask you to report to an exam, commonly known as a compensation and pension, or C&P exam. This exam helps evaluate your disability, as an assigned rating percentage is based on the severity of your condition. This affects how much disability compensation you may receive. An exam is not required with every claim. In general, an exam is requested when additional medical evidence is needed to substantiate the claim.

If an exam is needed, the staff at your local VA medical center, or a local doctor's office that VA partners with, will contact you. **They will either send you a letter by mail with the date and time of your exam or call you to negotiate a time that works for you.** To aid in this step of the claims process, you should make sure both the VA regional office and the VA medical center nearest you have your up-to-date address, phone number and email address so you get your exam notice in time.

9. Does everyone who files a claim need a VA claim exam?

No. VA will only ask you to attend a claim exam if more information is needed to decide your claim. If there is enough medical evidence in your file to support your claim, you may not need to report to an exam. Medical evidence may include treatment records from a VA medical center, doctor or hospital reports, test results and other documents.

10. Do I need to turn in any additional forms?

In some cases, you may need to complete one or more additional forms to support your disability claim. For example, you will need to fill out another form if you are claiming a dependent or applying for aid and attendance benefits.

If you are:	You will need to turn in:
A National Guard and Reserve member	All your service treatment and personnel records from your unit(s). VA will assist with attempting to obtain these records if you identify your Guard or Reserve unit on your claim form.

Claiming Individual Unemployability	A Veteran's Application for Increased Compensation Based on Unemployability (VA Form 21-8940) and A Request for Employment Information in Connection with Claim for Disability Benefits (VA Form 21-4192).
Claiming posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	General A Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (VA Form 21-0781) or you can fill out VA Form 21-0781 when you file a disability claim online. PTSD based on a personal assault A Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Secondary to Personal Assault (VA Form 21-0781a) or you can fill out VA Form 21-0781a when you file a disability claim online.
Claiming Aid and Attendance because you are in a nursing home	A Request for Nursing Home Information in Connection with Claim for Aid and Attendance (VA Form 21-0779).
Claiming dependents	An Application Request to Add and/or Remove Dependents (VA Form 21-686c) and If your dependent is a child in school between the ages of 18 and 23, you will also need to turn in a Request for Approval of School Attendance (VA Form 21-674). If your dependent is a seriously disabled child, you will also need to turn in all private medical records for the child's disabilities.
Authorizing the release of your private medical records to VA	Authorization to Disclose Information to VA (VA Form 21-4142) or You can fill out VA Form 21-4142 when you file a disability claim online.

Learn More

To learn more about the VA claims process, eligibility and more, visit www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/. Please call 800-827-1000, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST, if you have any further questions.



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