

VA Claim Evidence Checklist

Everything to gather *before* you file — so your disability claim goes in complete, organized, and ready for a faster, stronger decision.

DO THIS FIRST

File an Intent to File before you gather anything else. (VA Form 21-0966) It locks in your effective date and protects up to a year of potential back pay while you collect the documents below. You then have 12 months to submit your full claim.

1 Service & Identity Records

- DD Form 214** — Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty. Proves your service dates and character of discharge. Request a copy if you don't have one.
- Service Treatment Records (STRs)** — Your in-service medical records. These show the injury, illness, or event that started your condition while you were serving.
- Service Personnel Records** — Deployment history, duty assignments, performance reviews, and awards that support the circumstances of your claim.
- Prior VA decision or rating letters** — If you've filed before, include past decisions so you can show what changed (for increases or secondary conditions).

2 Medical Evidence

- Current diagnosis** — A clear, named diagnosis from a doctor for each condition you're claiming. Use the specific medical term, not a vague description.
- VA medical & hospital records** — All VA treatment records related to your claimed condition or showing a rated condition has worsened.
- Private (civilian) medical records** **VA Form 21-4142** — Records from non-VA doctors. Submit them yourself, or sign Form 21-4142/21-4142a so VA can request them for you.
- Test results & imaging** — Lab work, X-rays, MRIs, audiograms, sleep studies, and any objective evidence of the condition and its severity.
- Nexus letter / medical opinion** — A doctor's written opinion linking your condition to your service ("at least as likely as not"). Often the single most decisive piece of evidence.
- Treatment & medication history** — Ongoing prescriptions, therapy notes, and a record of how long you've been treated for the condition.

3 Statements & Lay Evidence

- Your personal statement** **VA Form 21-4138** — In your own words: when symptoms started, how they've progressed, and how they affect your daily life and work. Be specific and factual.
- Buddy / lay statements** **VA Form 21-10210** — Written by people who witnessed your condition or the in-service event: fellow service members, family, coworkers, or supervisors.
- Symptom journal or pain log** — Dated notes on flare-ups, frequency, and intensity. Concrete examples carry more weight than general descriptions.

Employment impact records — Missed work, accommodations, or lost jobs tied to your condition — important if you're claiming Individual Unemployability (TDIU).

4 Dependents & Added Benefits (if applicable)

Marriage certificate — Needed to add a spouse for additional compensation once your combined rating is 30% or higher.

Children's birth certificates — To add dependent children. Include school enrollment proof for children ages 18–23 who are full-time students.

Divorce decrees from prior marriages — For both you and your current spouse, to confirm eligibility for dependent benefits.

5 The Forms You'll File

Intent to File **VA Form 21-0966** — File this first (see top of page 1) to protect your effective date.

Main application **VA Form 21-526EZ** — Application for Disability Compensation. List every condition you're claiming — adding them later can restart your effective-date clock.

Authorization to release records **VA Form 21-4142** — Include if you want VA to gather your private medical records for you.

Condition-specific forms — Some claims need extra forms (for example, claims involving PTSD or unemployability). Check whether yours does before you submit.

FASTEST WAY TO FILE

Online: VA.gov lets you upload every document above with your application and save your progress.

MAIL (EVIDENCE INTAKE CENTER)

Dept. of Veterans Affairs
Evidence Intake Center, PO Box 4444
Janesville, WI 53547-4444 · 1-800-827-1000

Pro tips to strengthen your claim

- › **Name conditions precisely.** "Lumbar strain" beats "back problems." Raters match your words to specific rating criteria.
- › **Claim everything at once.** Include secondary conditions caused by a primary one — it's harder to add them after filing.
- › **Keep a full copy** of every document and form you submit, plus the date you sent it.
- › **Get free expert help.** Accredited VSOs (DAV, VFW, American Legion) and state veteran offices assist with claims at no cost.
- › **Don't skip the C&P exam.** If VA schedules a Compensation & Pension exam, attend it — a missed exam can delay or deny the claim.

This is just the checklist.

The full **Paralegal Guides** walk you through each condition step by step — what evidence wins, how to write statements raters take seriously, and how to avoid the mistakes that trigger denials and delays.

How the guides work: plain-English instructions, fill-in templates, and a document tracker — built so you can file a complete claim with confidence the first time.

Get the full guides at
www.paralegalguides.com

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