



Your VA Claim Exam

KNOW WHAT'S NEXT

If you've filed a claim with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for compensation or pension benefits, VA may ask you to go to an examination as part of the claim process. This is known as a VA claim exam or a compensation & pension (C&P) exam.

Your VA Claim Exam: Know What's Next

FACT SHEET | DECEMBER 2016

VA Claim Exams or C&P Exams

The VA claim exam, also called a C&P exam, is different from a regular medical appointment because the examiner won't prescribe any medicine or treat you for your disability. This exam occurs only if you file a compensation or pension claim. It is a part of the claim review process and helps VA determine if your disability is service connected, the level of your disability, or if your condition should receive an increased rating due to it worsening.

The amount of time the examiner spends with you during your exam depends on what conditions you claimed and if VA needs more information to make a decision. The length of your visit could be very short, or last an hour or more. However, a mental-health evaluation typically lasts two to four hours.

THE EXAMINER MAY:

- ✓ Ask you questions
- ✓ Observe your behavior
- ✓ Perform a limited physical exam
- ✓ Simply review your file with you

Each exam is different. Remember, your in-person visit is only one part of the claim review process. Typically, examiners spend time before and/or after your appointment reviewing your medical records. Even if your visit is short, he or she is still carefully reviewing your claim.

SCHEDULING OF THE EXAM



After you submit your claim, you may receive a phone call or a letter from VA or a VA partner asking you to come to one or more claim exams. Not every application for a benefit will require an exam; it depends on what medical evidence has been included with the application.

Contact VA immediately at the number provided to reschedule your exam if you have a conflict with your exam time. Please try not to reschedule on the day before or day of the exam.

It is important to attend your VA claim exam.



Missing your exam could cause VA to delay its decision on your claim or rate your claim "as-is" (i.e. only using the information that is in your file), which could impact your benefits.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.benefits.va.gov/compensation

Reach out to your local Veterans Service Organization

Call 1-800-827-1000

YOUR VA CLAIM EXAM: KNOW WHAT'S NEXT

Are your Medical Records Complete?

If you have medical documents that you have not yet sent to VA, you can bring them to your claim exam. However, the examiner cannot submit that information to be part of your claim on your behalf. Ideally, you should submit all of your medical evidence with your claim application or before your claim exam. This will help the examiner have the most complete picture of your health status.

Make Sure VA has Your Current Contact Information

Make sure that both the VA regional office and the VA medical center nearest to you have your current address, phone, and email information. This will help VA more quickly communicate with you about any need for a claim exam appointment.

After the Exam

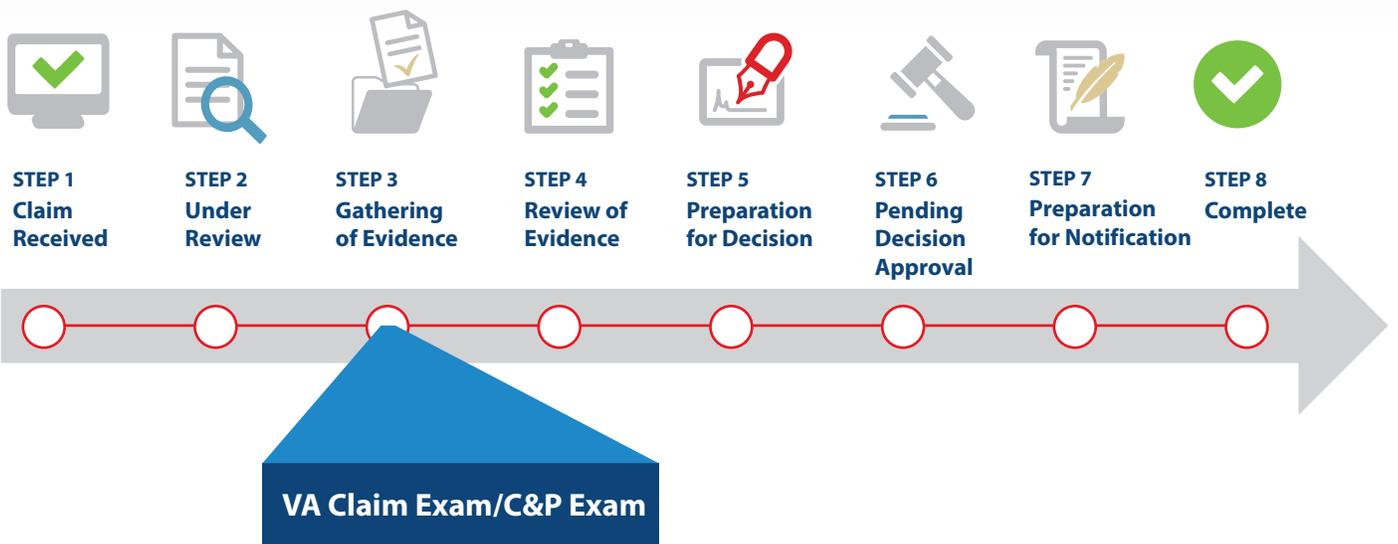
Following your exam, a report will be sent to a VA claims processor and added to your claim file. It will be used along with your claim application to make a decision on your claim.

REMEMBER: The examiner is only involved in performing the claim exam. They do not make the rating decision. Only a VA regional office can answer questions regarding your claim.

When Will I Get My Rating?

While every claim is different, it takes VA an average of three to four months to process a claim from beginning to end. Processing times depend on how complex your claim is and the number of conditions you've claimed. For the most recent average-time estimate, please visit www.vets.gov/disability-benefits/apply-for-benefits.

THE VA CLAIM PROCESS



 Disabilities determined by VA to be related to your military service can lead to monthly non-taxable compensation, enrollment in the VA health care system, a 10-point hiring preference for federal employment and other important benefits. Ask your VA representative or Veterans Service Organization representative about Disability Compensation, Pension, Health Care, Caregiver Program, Career Services, Educational Assistance, Home Loan Guaranty, Insurance and/or Dependents and Survivors' Benefits.

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If you've filed a claim for disability compensation or pension benefits with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), you may receive a phone call or a letter asking you to come to a claim exam, also called a compensation and pension (C&P) exam. This exam is a normal part of the VA claim process and helps VA determine the claim decision. The exam may be completed by a VA examiner or a VA partner. Make sure you know what to expect before going to your exam by reviewing the tips below.



Helpful Tips

TIPS SHEET | AUGUST 2016

TIP #1: It's important to attend your VA claim exam.

Missing your exam could cause VA to delay its decision on your claim or rate your claim "as-is" (i.e. only using the information that is in your file).

TIP #2: If you need to reschedule your exam, do it as early as possible.

Make sure you contact VA immediately to reschedule your exam if you have a conflict with your exam time. Unless it's an emergency, try not to reschedule on the day before or day of the exam.

TIP #3: Make sure VA has your current contact information.

Make sure both your nearest VA regional office and VA medical center have your current address, phone number, and email information. It is important your contact information is accurate in both places so they know how to contact you about your exam.

TIP #4: Call and confirm your exam with VA.

Call and confirm your exam time and location at the number provided to make sure you and VA have the correct appointment information.

TIP #5: Submit all your medical evidence with your claim application or to a VA regional office before you go to your exam.

You may bring medical records or evidence with you to your exam, but the examiner cannot submit any new information to be added to your claim file on your behalf. Make sure you submit all evidence and treatment records to a VA regional office before your exam so the examiner can have a complete picture of your health status.

TIP #6: Be prepared to attend multiple claim exams if you are claiming more than one disability.

If necessary, VA may request more than one claim exam if you submit a claim for several disabilities. VA will do its best to schedule multiple exams for the same day to limit your time spent.

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HELPFUL TIPS

TIP #7: Get there early.

Plan to give yourself time to get to your exam location and arrive about 15 minutes early. Examiners may not agree to perform your exam if you are late.

TIP #8: Remember, physical contact may not be required as part of your exam.

The VA claim exam is not a treatment exam; it's an exam that allows VA to review the disabilities you are claiming. Depending on the information included in your claim application, the examiner may only need to ask a few questions to complete the exam.

TIP #9: Be truthful and honest when you answer questions during your exam.

When the examiner asks you questions during your exam, be truthful and honest: don't exaggerate your symptoms or pain, but don't downplay them either. The examiner is looking to capture information on the disabilities you have claimed. This will help you get the most accurate rating possible.

TIP #10: Do not ask the examiner about the status of your claim during your exam. They don't know.

The examiner performing your exam is only responsible for conducting the exam and providing the results to a VA claims processor. They do not make any claim rating decisions and often do not know the full claims process. If you have questions about your claim, call 1-800-827-1000, contact your accredited representative, such as a Veterans Service Organization, or check eBenefits to find out more about your claim status.

TIP #11: Remember, the length of your exam does not affect your claim decision.

Exams can range anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more. Each exam is different depending on the Veteran and the information that has been included in the claim application. Don't forget, the examiner will spend time before and/or after your appointment reviewing your medical records. Even if your visit is short, your claim is still being carefully reviewed.

 Disabilities determined by VA to be related to your military service can lead to monthly non-taxable compensation, enrollment in the VA health care system, a 10-point hiring preference for federal employment and other important benefits. Ask your VA representative or Veterans Service Organization representative about Disability Compensation, Pension, Health Care, Caregiver Program, Career Services, Educational Assistance, Home Loan Guaranty, Insurance and/or Dependents and Survivors' Benefits.

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VA COMPENSATION & PENSION

Understanding Mental Health Examinations

HOW IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION EVALUATED BY VA?

When you submit a claim for a particular mental health condition, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will process your claim as a claim for any mental health conditions that may be reasonably defined by:

- ▶ The description of the claim
- ▶ The symptoms that you describe
- ▶ The information and evidence that you submit, and
- ▶ Any other information and evidence obtained

Since mental health conditions share similar symptomatology and findings, in order to make sure the correct mental health condition is evaluated as it relates to your claim, VA does a thorough review of all of the medical and non-medical evidence surrounding your claim.

For VA purposes, you can only be rated for one mental health condition. VA will review the entire body of evidence to gain a clear understanding of how your mental health condition symptoms impact your social and industrial functioning and which diagnosed mental health condition(s) may be related to your claim.

When determining the actual evaluation of the mental health condition, VA refers to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV or DSM-5) findings to assign appropriate evaluations using the Mental Disorder Criteria in the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities.

WHY IS A REVIEW MENTAL HEALTH EXAM NEEDED?

Future mental health exams are only required or allowed under certain circumstances:

- ▶ When assigning a pre-stabilization rating
- ▶ When the evidence of record clearly shows the likelihood for improvement

Sound medical evidence is required, indicating the likelihood of improvement, to warrant a future exam. Other than those reasons listed above, there are no automatic future exams required or allowed by regulations.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ATTEND MY MENTAL HEALTH EXAM?

When a mental health examination is requested to confirm your continued entitlement to disability benefits, it is important that you attend your scheduled disability examination. If for some reason you are unable to attend your mental health examination you must notify VA and request your examination to be rescheduled. However, if you fail to attend your scheduled mental health examination without adequate reason, the VA will review the current evidence of record and may be required by law to do one of the following:

- ▶ Continue payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled, if there is no change in severity of your disability(ies) as supported by evidence of record,
- ▶ Discontinue payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled, or
- ▶ Reduce payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled to minimum evaluation established by law.

It is very important that you attend your review examination to ensure that the abovementioned actions do not occur in the absence of the findings that would have been obtained through your examination. VA wants to ensure that the appropriate disability rating is assigned based on your individual examination findings.

WHY HAS MY DIAGNOSIS CHANGED?

A change in diagnosis of a mental health condition can happen when there is

- ▶ A progression in the mental health condition resulting in the additional symptomatology better fitting the criteria of a different mental health condition diagnosis,
- ▶ A correction of an error in the prior diagnosis, or
- ▶ A development of a new and separate mental health condition

Remember that there can only be one evaluation for a mental health condition, so any change in diagnosis will reflect the most accurate diagnosis and symptomatology.

REMEMBER: The examiner is only involved in performing the claim exam. They do not make the rating decision. Only a VA regional office can answer questions regarding your claim.



For more information, visit <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claimexam.asp>



U.S. Department
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VA CLAIM EXAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)



Q: What is a VA claim exam, also known as a Compensation and Pension (C&P) examination?

If you've filed a claim with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for disability compensation or pension benefits, VA may ask you to go to an examination as part of the claim process. For disability compensation, this exam helps VA determine if you have a disability related to your military service or if your condition should receive an increased rating due to it worsening. In the case of pension claims, the exam documents the level of your disability. This is known as a VA claim exam or a compensation & pension (C&P) exam.

This exam is different from a regular medical appointment because the examiner won't prescribe any medicine or treat you – for instance, you won't receive a referral to a specialist. The examiner will only perform a medical review to identify or confirm any disabilities shared in your claim application. They will record the findings and provide them to a VA claims processor to complete the claim process.

Q: Is everyone scheduled for a VA claim exam?

No, not everyone will be requested to attend a VA exam. After you have applied for disability compensation and/or pension, you may receive a phone call or a letter from VA or a VA partner asking you to come to a claim exam, also known as a C&P exam. If you have claimed benefits based upon several disabilities, you may be asked to report for one or more exams so each disability can be reviewed by an appropriate examiner. This is a routine request. You may be asked to go to a VA medical center or a VA partner to complete the claim exams. Not every application for a benefit will require an exam; it depends on what medical evidence has been included with the application.

Q: How is the VA claim exam or C&P exam scheduled?

A VA medical center or a VA partner is responsible for contacting you about scheduling a claim exam. They may either mail you a letter with the date and time of your appointment(s) and/or call you to find a time that fits with your schedule. If you are receiving treatment at a VA medical center, make sure they have your current address, phone number and email information. The wrong information could cause your appointment letter to be delayed and not reach you in time.

It is a good idea to call and confirm the exam time(s) and locations to make sure you and VA or the VA partner have the correct appointment information. Use the phone number on your appointment letter or if you were called, use the phone number left by VA or the VA partner. If you don't show up to your exam, you may have a longer wait to get your exam rescheduled; it could delay your claim; and/or your claim could be rated "as-is" (using only the information in your file).

Q: The date and/or time of my C&P exam doesn't work for me. Can I reschedule my exam?

If your scheduled exam date or time does not work with some other life event, immediately call the number provided and try to reschedule. Unless it is an emergency situation, try not to reschedule the exam the day before or on the day of the exam. Not responding to a phone or letter request for scheduling an exam or missing the exam could cause VA to delay its decision on your claim. Not showing up to your exam takes up an appointment time another Veteran could have used, and also could cause your claim to be rated "as-is" based only on the information in your application. Most facilities try to meet your requests (if possible) if you have a good reason for rescheduling your time and you give enough notice.



Q: How early do I need to get there before the VA claim exam?

It is helpful to be at least 15 minutes early to your scheduled exam time, leaving enough time to arrive at the facility location where your exam will take place. Once you check in with the exam staff, they will be able to answer questions on how long you will have to wait. Many examiners will not perform your exam if you are late, as they will not have enough time to complete the required history and exam review and take care of other Veterans on their schedule.

Q: What will the claim exam be like?

Unlike a typical medical exam or other healthcare appointment you may have with VA, the claim exam will not give you any treatment or prescribe any medicine. The examiner's job is to review your medical records related to your disability claim, including the claim file, also known as your c-file/e-file. The c-file typically includes medical treatment records from Department of Defense (DoD), your DoD personnel records, treatment records from your health care providers and any other documents submitted.

The amount of time the examiner spends with you during your exam depends on what conditions you claimed and if VA needs more information to make a decision. Following your exam, the examiner completes a report that includes an analysis of clinical test results, if any were performed. You have the right to request and receive copies of your test results by contacting your VA regional office.

Q: How long will my claim exam take?

Each exam is different depending on the information and needs of each Veteran. Exams can range anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more. The examiner may ask you questions, observe you, perform a limited physical exam or simply review your file with you. The time an examiner spends with you during your exam may appear brief, but remember, even if your visit is short, he or she is still carefully reviewing your claim. Examiners often spend an hour or more before or after your appointment reviewing your claim.

Q: Where does the claim exam fit within the claim process?

VA schedules the claim exam at the end of the "Information Gathering" stage, which is about 60% of the way through the claim decision process. After your exam, the examiner will complete a report that includes a review of the exam and any clinical test results. The examiner submits the report back to the VA regional office so it can be included within your c-file/e-file and they can continue processing your claim. VA will then perform a final review on your whole claim package, and make a decision on your claim.

Q: Can the person doing my VA claim exam tell me the status of my claim?

No, the examiner is only involved in performing the exam and providing the results to the claims processor. They are not part of the rating process, and do not make the rating decisions. They will never know the outcome of your pending claim. Only a VA regional office can answer questions regarding rating decisions.

To get a claim status update, please go to eBenefits.va.gov or, if you are working with an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representative, contact them for a status update. You may also contact VA at 1-800-827-1000, and a contact representative will be pleased to answer your questions.

Q: Can I bring new treatment information or other evidence with me that I did not submit as part of my claim?

Yes, if you have any medical documents that were not previously sent to VA, you can bring them to your claim exam. However, the examiner may not be able to submit that information on your behalf. All new information can be uploaded



through eBenefits.va.gov, submitted to your accredited VSO representative, or mailed to VA using the appropriate address found here - <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/ mailingaddresses.asp>. Ideally, you should submit all of your medical evidence with your claim application or before of your claim exam so the examiner doing your exam has the most complete picture of your health status.

Q: Can I bring my spouse or family member to my claim exam?

Yes, at your request and the approval of the examiner, family members, caregivers, and significant others may be allowed to join you during an exam, but may not participate in and/or interfere with the exam. Service animals are also permitted.

Q: I missed my scheduled claim exam, what should I do?

If you were unable to attend your exam and did not contact VA in advance, your appointment will be considered a “no-show.” You will have to request a new exam appointment by calling 1-800-827-1000. If you fail to show up to any claim or C&P exam(s), it is likely that your claim decision will be delayed while VA tries to reschedule your exam. Your claim could also be rated “as-is” (using only the current information in your file). It is very helpful to make sure that both the VA regional office and the VA medical center nearest to you have your current address, phone number, and email information. This will help make sure VA can communicate with you about any need for a claim exam appointment. It is also a good idea to call and confirm the exam time(s) and location(s) that you have received to make sure you and VA have the correct appointment information.

Q: My claim exam is scheduled far away from where I live; can I get help with paying for my travel and hotel?

Yes, if you are scheduled for a claim exam or C&P exam, you can request travel reimbursement. Mileage is calculated from your door to the exam facility. Upon check-in, your travel pay request will be submitted electronically. Travel pay is now direct deposited. Overnight lodging is available for Veterans who have to travel over 2 hours (or can drive no faster than 50 mph) and have an appointment before 9:00AM.

Q: The examiner didn't even touch me during my claim exam. Is that normal?

Think of the claim exam, or C&P exam, as a medical review. Unlike a typical medical exam or other healthcare appointment you may have with VA, an examiner will not provide you any treatment, make any referrals to other medical providers or prescribe any medicine. Depending on the information in your claim file, such as medical documents from current providers, and completed Disability Benefit Questionnaires (DBQs), the examiner will determine what additional questions and information are needed to confirm your health status and complete the exam. In some instances, your file may be so complete that only a few follow up questions may be needed. Know that your case is being carefully reviewed and VA's decision will not depend on the length of your exam visit.

The in-person part of your claim exam is only one part of what examiners do as part of their evaluation. They also typically spend more than an hour before or after appointments reviewing claims files to ensure they are providing the most complete and accurate reviews possible. All of the supporting documents that you provide to support your claim play an important part in the examiner's report.

If you have a question about what is happening during your claim exam, you should feel comfortable asking the examiner about what he or she is doing and what you can expect during your visit. Keep in mind they are medical experts who are following up on the medical information you provided in your claim application. Neither VA examiners nor VA partner examiners are involved in rating your claim. They are not always familiar with the full claim process and



cannot tell you when a decision will be made. All claims-related questions should be directed to the VA regional office nearest you.

Q: I am unhappy with the treatment I received from the person doing my claim exam, what should I do?

If you attend your claim exam and have a negative experience with a VA examiner or a VA partner examiner, VA encourages you to share feedback immediately. You may go to the C&P exam supervisor within a VA medical center or the supervisor within the VA partner facility, reach out to the VA patient advocate at your closest VA medical facility, or call the number on your original appointment letter. It is helpful to write out a statement of concern that can be submitted as part of your claim file. Share concerns immediately. Do not wait until your claim decision has been made. This will help ensure any issues are handled as quickly as possible.

Q: My claim was denied without a claim exam or C&P exam. Is this a normal event?

VA awards disability compensation when the claim file shows three things:

1. Current diagnosis of a disability
2. Record of an event that happened during military service that could have resulted in the disability
3. An opinion that the disability is related to military service, also called a “nexus opinion”

If the first two items are clearly shown in your claim application, that’s when the C&P exam process comes in. If you did not submit enough information with your claim application to show that you have a current diagnosis of a disability or that an event occurred in military service that may have caused the disability, there is no need for VA to schedule a claim exam to get a nexus opinion to tie the two events together. Make sure you submit all relevant military and treatment records as part of your claim application.

Q: Why is a contractor conducting my claim exam and not a VA examiner?

VA may use contractors or VA partners who are medical experts with experience working with Veterans to speed up the claim process. They support the timelier scheduling of claim exams and evidence gathering in support of your claim. You may get scheduled for a claim exam with a VA partner. They follow the same HIPAA policies as VA, so you are guaranteed that your privacy is protected.

The exam is performed at the expense of VA and, just as if the exam was done at a VA medical center, the exam is used in the claim decision process for disability compensation or pension benefits. The medical facilities that work with VA are bound by the same rules and privacy laws as VA, so you can be sure your exam can be trusted and all of your information is secure and will be shared directly with VA.

Q: Are there organizations that can help me with my claim exam?

VA recommends you work with an accredited representative, such as a VSO, to help guide you through the entire claims process. These representatives can help you gather evidence in support of your claim, help file your claim and address issues as you move through the claim decision process. You can search for a representative on eBenefits, <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/vso-search>.