

AIVetGuide

Claim Readiness Checklist

Prepare evidence, timelines, and next steps before filing.

Important

Use this guide as educational preparation only. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or a guarantee of VA benefits. For official help, contact VA or an accredited representative.

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Claim Readiness Checklist

Use this guide before filing a new claim, secondary claim, increase request, or review request. The goal is to organize facts, evidence, and questions before you submit anything.

Quick idea

A strong claim usually answers four basic questions: What condition are you claiming? What happened in service or what service-connected condition caused/aggravated it? What evidence shows the condition exists now? How does it affect your life and work?

Step 1 - Identify the claim type

- ☐ New claim - for a condition not previously decided by VA.
- ☐ Secondary claim - for a new condition linked to an already service-connected condition.
- ☐ Increase - for a service-connected condition that has worsened.
- ☐ Decision review or appeal - for a denial, low rating, or effective-date issue from a recent decision.
- ☐ Individual Unemployability - for a service-connected condition that prevents steady substantially gainful work.

Step 2 - Protect your timeline

Consider submitting an Intent to File before gathering a full evidence packet. VA explains that an Intent to File may preserve a potential effective date if the completed claim is filed within the allowed time. Keep the confirmation for your records.

Step 3 - Gather the core information

- ☐ List each condition separately. Example: migraine headaches, lumbar strain, tinnitus, sleep apnea, PTSD, knee limitation.
- ☐ Write the approximate start date or event date for each condition.
- ☐ Identify where the condition appears in service records, medical records, or lay statements.
- ☐ List current symptoms, treatment, medication, devices, therapy, or limitations.
- ☐ Write down how often symptoms happen, how severe they are, how long they last, and what triggers them.
- ☐ Note work impact, missed work, duty limitations, safety concerns, sleep problems, mobility problems, or social impact.
- ☐ Identify private doctors, hospitals, therapists, chiropractors, urgent care visits, or specialist visits.
- ☐ Create a folder with service records, private records, VA records, personal statements, buddy statements, and any test results.

Step 4 - Build a simple evidence packet

Document	What to include
Claim cover sheet	Name, contact information, claimed conditions, and a short list of attachments.
Personal statement	Your timeline, symptoms, service event, and daily impact in plain language.
Medical records	Diagnosis, treatment notes, medication, imaging, labs, sleep study, therapy notes, or specialist records.
Service evidence	Service treatment records, personnel records, deployment information, duty history, incident reports, or line-of-duty records.
Lay or buddy statements	Statements from people who observed the event, symptoms, behavior changes, pain, sleep issues, or functional limits.
Nexus evidence	Medical explanation connecting the current condition to service or to another service-connected condition, when needed.
Symptom log	Dates, flare-ups, severity, duration, missed work, and activities you could not do.

Step 5 - Ask these questions before filing

- ☐ Do I have a current diagnosis or ongoing symptoms documented somewhere?
- ☐ What is the service event, injury, illness, exposure, or already service-connected condition?
- ☐ What evidence connects the condition to service?
- ☐ Do my records show the current severity, not only the diagnosis?
- ☐ Have I included dates, locations, units, duty role, and names where helpful?
- ☐ Am I missing private treatment records or permission forms for VA to request them?
- ☐ If this is an increase, do I have up-to-date evidence showing the condition worsened?
- ☐ If this is a review or appeal, do I know exactly why VA denied or rated the claim low?

Common gaps to fix before submitting

- Only saying a condition exists without explaining when it started or why it is linked to service.
- Submitting old records but no current evidence of severity.
- Using vague statements like "it hurts" without frequency, severity, duration, and functional impact.
- For secondary claims, not explaining how the service-connected condition caused or aggravated the new condition.
- For increases, not showing what changed since the last decision.
- For denials, not addressing the exact denial reason in the decision letter.

30-minute preparation workflow

1. Write the list of conditions you want to discuss or file.
2. Write a one-line service connection theory for each condition.
3. Mark each condition as new, secondary, increase, or review/appeal.

4. Write the strongest evidence you already have for each condition.
5. Write the missing evidence you still need to request or create.
6. Decide whether to submit an Intent to File before continuing.

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AI Vet Guide is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs. These materials are educational and may help veterans organize questions and evidence. They do not replace official VA guidance, medical care, legal advice, or help from an accredited representative.

Official Sources Used

These guides summarize public VA information and should be checked against the official source before filing or responding to a VA decision.

- [VA Disability Compensation](#)
- [Eligibility for VA Disability Benefits](#)
- [How To File A VA Disability Claim](#)
- [VA Form 21-526EZ Online Claim](#)
- [Evidence Needed For Your Disability Claim](#)
- [Your Intent To File A VA Claim](#)
- [Types Of Disability Claims And When To File](#)

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