



VA Claim Prep Checklist

A quick, printable list to get organized, avoid mistakes, and file stronger.

This checklist is guidance from fellow veterans, not legal advice. For free accredited help, contact a VA-recognized VSO.

0) Before You File

- ☐ Create a VA.gov account and confirm your contact info and **direct deposit**.
- ☐ Locate your **DD214** and key service records.
- ☐ File an **Intent to File** to lock in your effective date.

1) Map Your Conditions

- ☐ List each **primary** condition with diagnosis date.
- ☐ List any **secondary** conditions (caused or aggravated by a service-connected condition).
- ☐ Write a one-line goal for each condition (service connection or increase).

2) Gather Evidence

- ☐ Service Treatment Records (STRs)
- ☐ VA records (MyHealtheVet / VA.gov)
- ☐ Private records (doctor notes, imaging, labs)
- ☐ Supporting statements (spouse/buddy)
- ☐ **Nexus** letter if needed (clear medical rationale)
- ☐ Daily logs (pain, function, flare-ups)

3) Build the Argument

- ☐ Match symptoms to **38 CFR Part 4** criteria (rating schedule).
- ☐ For secondary claims, cite **38 CFR § 3.310** where applicable.
- ☐ Draft a short statement tying evidence to the rule ("because... therefore...").

Tip: Label files clearly, e.g., `Lastname_Firstname_YYYY-MM_Diagnosis_Xray.pdf`. Keep a folder per claim.

4) File the Claim (VA Form 21-526EZ)

- ☐ Select **Fully Developed Claim** when possible (upload all evidence upfront).
- ☐ Enter each condition as a separate line item (primary or secondary).
- ☐ Upload evidence with clear descriptions (who, what, when, why it matters).
- ☐ Submit and save your confirmation page/ID.

5) C&P Exam Prep

- ☐ Prepare 3–5 real-life examples of how the condition limits **function** (work, home, sleep).
- ☐ Don't minimize or overstate—be accurate and consistent with records.
- ☐ Know key exam forms (DBQs) and rating factors for your condition(s).
- ☐ Bring meds list and assistive devices if used.

6) After You File

- ☐ Watch for **VA letters** and exam scheduling—respond quickly.
- ☐ If the VA requests evidence, upload within the window (note the deadline).
- ☐ Keep a log of every call, upload, and letter (date/time/summary).

7) Decision Arrives

- ☐ Read the decision letter and **codesheet** (diagnostic codes, percentages, effective dates).
- ☐ Disagree? Within **1 year** choose: **HLR** (error review), **Supplemental** (new evidence), or **Board**.

Need more help? See our free templates and field manuals.

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