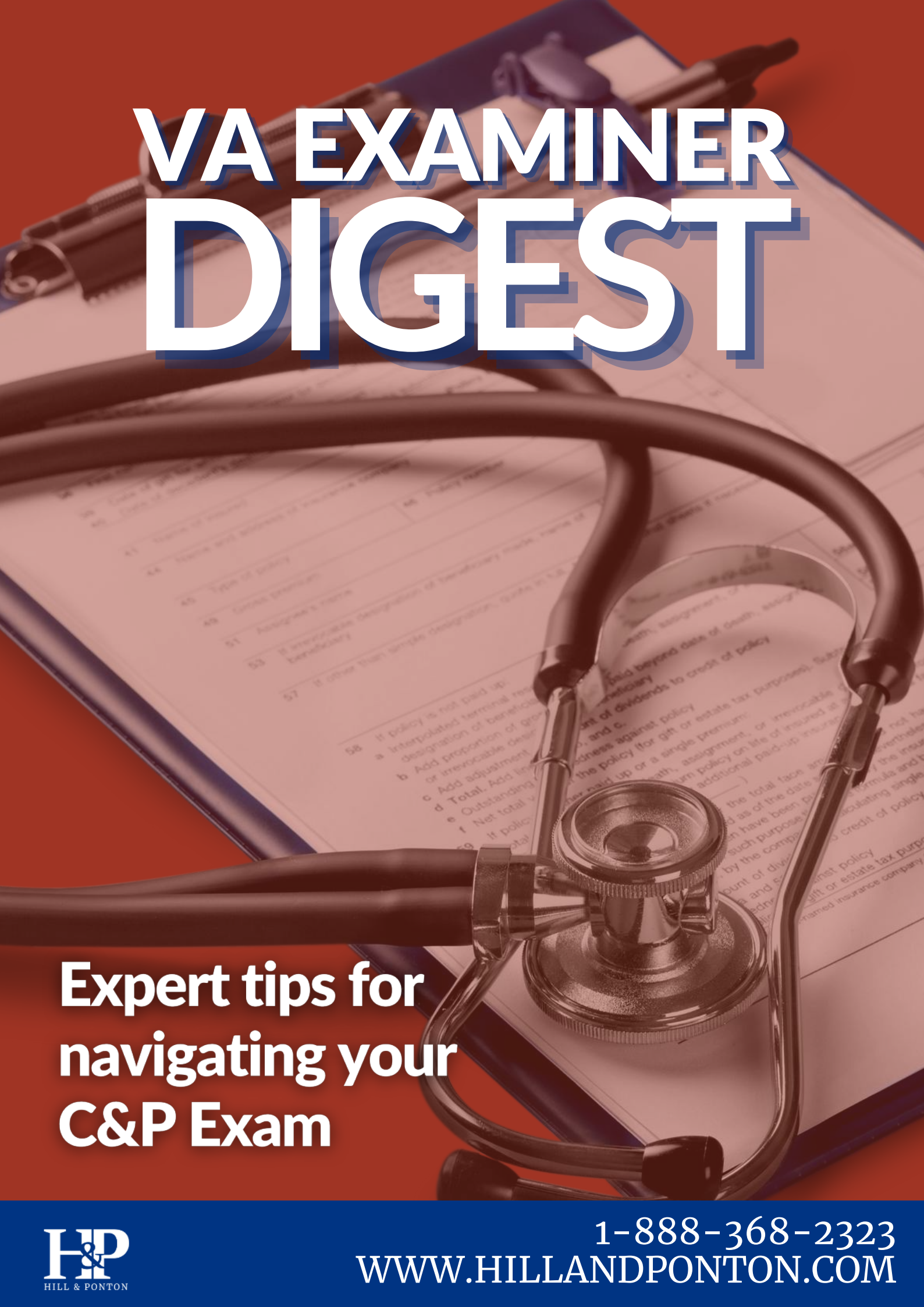


VA EXAMINER DIGEST

A stethoscope is positioned diagonally across the frame, resting on a clipboard. The clipboard holds a form with various fields and text, including "Type of policy", "Assignee's name", and "Beneficiary". The background is a solid red color.

**Expert tips for
navigating your
C&P Exam**

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Introduction



Welcome to the *VA Examiner Digest*, your guide to navigating your Compensation and Pension (C&P) exams with confidence.

Inside, you'll find:

- **Preparation tips** for what to bring and how to present your case.
- **Communication strategies** to clearly explain your condition.
- **Insights on unique claims**, including exposure-related and mental health assessments.

Use this digest as a trusted resource to understand your rights and make informed decisions on your VA journey.



About Hill & Ponton

Since 1986, Hill & Ponton has been a trusted leader in VA Disability law, dedicated solely to helping veterans across the United States secure the benefits they deserve. Founded by Navy veteran Brian Hill and attorney Carol Ponton, our firm is rooted in compassion, advocacy, and a relentless pursuit of justice. We work on a contingency basis, meaning you only pay if we win your case, ensuring that every veteran has access to quality legal representation without upfront costs.

Our team's unmatched experience and dedication have led to a 96% success rate in cases we accept. With over 30,000 claims handled and \$300 million in benefits recovered, we are committed to being your ally throughout the VA claims process.

Our resources and content are enriched by insights from certified medical professionals and disability examiners who contribute valuable clinical perspectives to support veterans' understanding of the VA system.

If you've been denied benefits or are trying to increase your rating, contact us today for a free case evaluation and see how we can help you fight for the benefits you deserve.

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How do I know if my C&P Exam went well?

BY NATHAN COSTUIC, RN, APRN, FNP-BC – VA MEDICAL EXAMINER

Compensation and Pension Exams (C&P) are one of the most critical components of the VA claims process and often central to the success or failure of a claim when seeking to establish service connection for a disability.

As a VA examiner who performs these types of exams, I often encounter veterans who have been on the receiving end of a poorly-conducted exam or examiner's report.

While you won't really know how your exam went until you either see the completed exam report or receive a Veterans Affairs disability letter, there are a few tell-tale signs to clue you in to the successfulness of the visit... even while you're in the middle of one!

Understanding these factors can help you best prepare for your C&P exam or ask for another one if things really went sour.



What is a Compensation and Pension Exam?

Compensation and Pension (C&P) Exams are assessments conducted by medical providers to determine the clinical status of your disability, document it in a Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ), and oftentimes produce a Medical Opinion as to whether or not your disability was caused by military service.

Here's a few general items that are helpful to know about your C&P exam:

1. The VA claims process consists of a lot of "hurry up and wait."

Months may go by after veterans initially submit a VA disability claim before a C&P exam is suddenly scheduled, sometimes only with a few days' notice.

Please note you may not always receive a notification in time.

2. The VA or contracted VA doctor will not call you to determine a preferred date/time.

They will simply notify you of your appointment time via mail/email/phone, with the option to reschedule if the appointment coincides with a life event.

3. C&P exams tend to feel unusual.

After discussing all your disability symptoms, the provider will not recommend treatment since the purpose of the exam is purely to assess rather than to treat.

4. Multiple C&P exams are often ordered for the same claim.

This can lead to some justifiable puzzlement on why you need to be seen again.

Just know that the VA often likes to see multiple opinions and exam results from different providers to evaluate your claim.

5. Don't be surprised if your disability exam was not conducted at a VA Medical Center

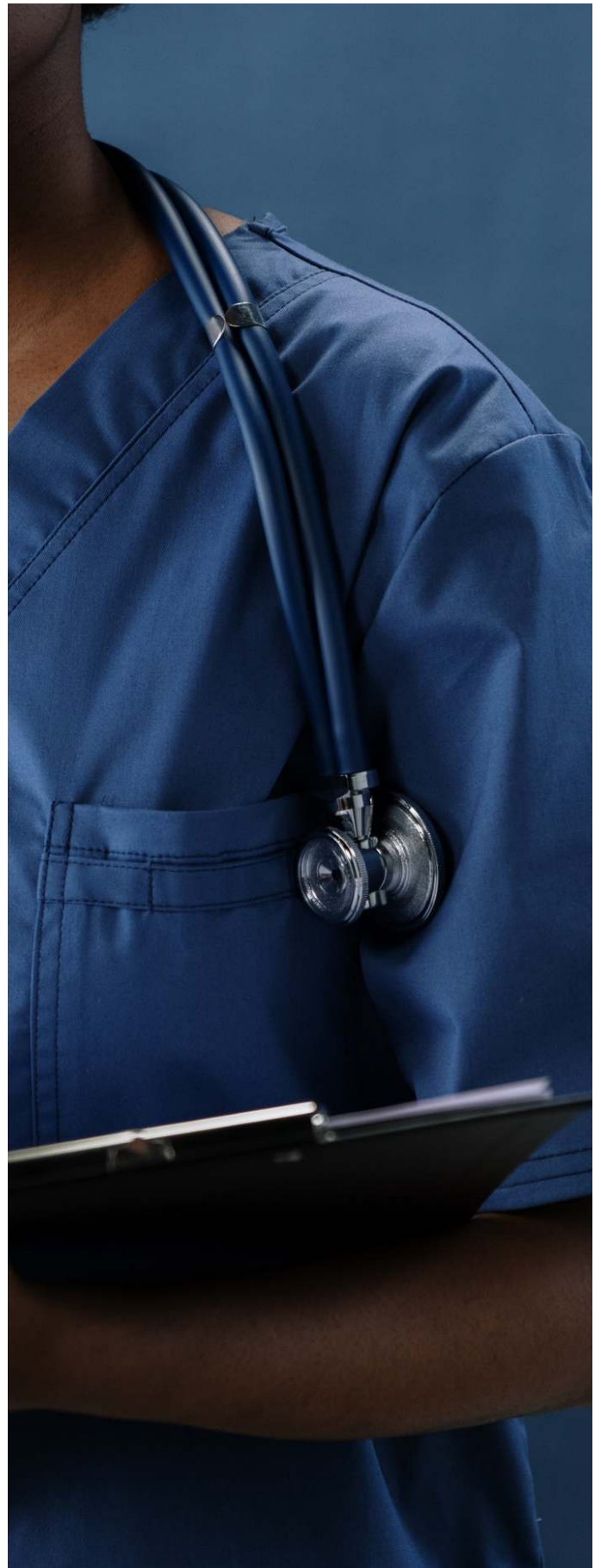
Your VA regional office often hires outside contractors to help furnish exam results more rapidly and meet the high volume of claims in the system (especially after passage of the recent PACT Act).

Here are some signs your VA C&P Exam went well:

1. Your entire claims file was available for the exam.

Your claims file (aka C-File) is a large record containing all the claims you've made, service treatment records (STR's), military records, civilian medical records and all the decisions that have been made in the past for your claims.

If that sounds like a lot of paperwork, it is. Almost all C-Files I encounter have 3,000 – 12,000 pages, which brings me to my next point...



2. You directed the examiner to the relevant medical evidence.

A large part of your disability examiner's job is to comb the entire record searching for information relevant to your claim.

However, the C-File is basically just a giant, searchable PDF thousands of pages long, making it oftentimes difficult to review and find contextual information in handwritten documents and redundant text.

Doing anything to get on the examiner's good side helps, and one of the best ways to do this is to save them some work.

Before your visit, prepare by going through your records, finding all the documents relevant to your claim, and bringing a hard copy of these in.

3. The VA ordered the right Disability Benefits Questionnaire for service connection for a specific diagnosis.

For the VA, almost all disabilities fall into distinct categories.

For example, there are many different types of knee issues you could be diagnosed with, but they all must be assessed using the Knee DBQ.

That may sound like a no-brainer, but as an examiner, *I often see the wrong assessment ordered.*

A common one I encounter is an Arthritis DBQ being ordered for arthritis in a specific joint.

This is problematic because the Arthritis DBQ is only intended for system-wide arthritic conditions.

This matters – since the DBQ's are filled with specific questions about your condition, **getting the wrong DBQ can lead to insufficient information for determining your VA disability rating.**



It's usually obvious which DBQ is the right one, so a good way to approach this is to simply ask your examiner what DBQ was ordered.

You can say something like, "I've heard the wrong DBQ sometimes gets ordered – can you clarify which one we have for my claim today?"

If you've received appointment paperwork prior to the visit, the DBQ's are often listed there as well. For a full list of downloadable DBQ's, visit our [DBQ resource center](#).

4. Your examiner took enough time to assess your disability.

Many of the veterans I've seen mention how previous C&P exams they've attended felt too short, with not too many questions asked about their condition and symptoms.

While some exams are indeed very short in nature, this is often a legitimate concern.

Consider the fact that during your examination, the doctor is expected to:

Conduct a thorough medical history



This includes onset of the condition, treatment you've received through the years, current symptoms related to your illness, specific examples of functional limitations caused by your condition and how your illness affects daily life, identifying any assistive devices you may be using, asking about recent medical testing, etc.

Review other conditions you have that are relevant.

Some conditions may be relevant to the one being claimed (especially if you're claiming [secondary service connection](#)).



Perform a focused, but thorough, physical exam.

If one is indicated for the condition (including the use of a goniometer anytime range of motion testing is required).

If you're filing for an increased rating, they should ask what's changed since the last time you filed.

As you can tell, there's a lot to cover even for just one claim.

Understanding this can help you get a feeling for whether or not the examiner progressed too rapidly, didn't ask enough questions, or skipped parts of the examination.

5. Your provider was specialized to administer your exam.

In some circumstances, you may encounter an examiner who doesn't have the right credentials to administer your C&P exam.

For example, you will need specialty providers for hearing loss, mental illness, or dental/vision issues – these cannot be performed by a general provider.

Most other claims can be seen by a general doctor, so don't be surprised if the examiner assigned to review your lower back injury isn't an orthopedic spine surgeon.

Can I challenge a bad C&P exam?

Yes! If you suspect your C&P exam was inappropriately performed for any of the above reasons, you may request another C&P exam from the VA.

Please note that you are not guaranteed to receive one, so it may help to write down a list of reasons why you believe your C&P exam was not performed appropriately or if it was performed by the wrong specialist.

How do I challenge a bad C&P exam and request a new one?

In order to report issues with the Compensation and Pension exam you've received and request a new one, document the reasons you think it went poorly in a formal Memorandum for Record (MFR).

Then, call the VA, use your MFR to guide your explanation of why you think a new exam is warranted, and then upload the MFR with the rest of your claim paperwork.

Private medical opinions can also help support your case. Keep in mind that the appeals process is also in place should you receive a claim denial letter. C&P exams are one of the critical pivot points when pursuing VA disability compensation and establishing a service connected disability for VA benefits, but it is also one that veterans tend to understand the least.

QUICK TIPS: C&P EXAM SUCCESS

- **Bring Key Documents:** Guide your examiner with relevant records.
- **Check Your DBQ:** Confirm the right questionnaire is used.
- **Ensure Thoroughness:** Your exam should cover history and symptoms.

Document issues if your exam falls short and contact the VA.

7 things you should bring to a C&P exam

BY NATHAN COSTUIC,
RN, APRN, FNP-BC -
VA MEDICAL
EXAMINER

If you were to ask the VA, they would tell you that you don't need to bring anything to a VA disability exam (also known as a Compensation and Pension – or C&P – exam).

While it is technically true that showing up empty-handed won't impact your VA disability claims from moving forward in the system, it doesn't mean that you'll be best prepared to fight for your case. At Hill and Ponton, we want to arm you with everything you could possibly need to be successful in establishing a service connected disability.



I've been a C&P examiner for the past several years, and I have seen too many patients show up missing the critical info that would make supporting their claim much easier. Before we get to the actual list, it might help to look at all of this from a specific angle, which is to...

CONSIDER THE VA DISABILITY CLAIM FROM THE EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE!

When you are being interviewed by a C&P doctor, they are focused on two categories of information: subjective and objective.

1. **Subjective information** includes your symptoms, description of your condition, and the impact it has on your life.
2. **Objective information** has more to do with things you can directly measure free from bias, like a blood pressure, your lumbar range of motion, or renal function on recent diagnostic labs. The VA requests as much objective information as possible in an exam report.



Subjective information is important since it helps the doctor understand the overall narrative regarding your disability, but most claims cannot stand on subjective data alone.

So when your examiner is able to see objective measures relevant to your disability, this goes a long way in propping up the necessary medical evidence.

With this in mind, you'll begin to see why bringing the following items to your VA claim exam can help:

1. Relevant Medical Records

“Bring medical records to an exam? Why? I submitted all of those already!”

The VA's official guidance on this topic is that all of the medical records relevant to your disability should be submitted via one of several, formal channels (which should absolutely be done).

Because of this recommendation, they maintain that you don't need to bring any records in-person to your exam, since the doctor should have access (in the C-File) to everything you've submitted.

In an ideal world, this would always work out. But consider for a moment how these records are processed – they may end up passing through multiple hands, softwares, and workflows to actually end up at your examiner's desk.

This takes time, and in some cases, the records you've submitted might not make it to the C-File in time for your exam.



Think about all the different clinics, hospitals, or centers where you've been treated for your disability and compile a hard-copy folder of all the relevant records to bring with you to your exam.

2. Hand-Selected Service Treatment Records

Service Treatment Records are documents that show everything you were treated for while you were in military service. Unfortunately, there tend to be a few problems with these records:

1. Many of these records (especially the older ones) are handwritten and can be difficult to read through.
2. Many of these records can be quite old and deteriorated, further making it difficult to understand them.

Your examiner typically looks through documents by using a search function.

As you can imagine, the reasons above make it impossible to use that feature, which leads to sometimes having to comb through hundreds (sometimes thousands...!) of pages manually.

You obviously may be more motivated to find this information than they are, so to mitigate these difficulties, you can obtain a copy of your military records and comb through them yourself. **Highlight any information that is relevant to your disability** and have it on hand to show your examiner during your exam.

3. A Current Medication List

You'd be correct for thinking that your most current list of medications should be listed in your claim file (aka C-File).

However, it may help to know that the C-File is a compilation of records that cuts off after a certain date.





Because of this, if your last documented appointment was a year ago (with current medications documented at that time), that list may no longer be up to date or accurate.

Often, patients with multiple illnesses aren't fully aware of the finer details related to their diagnoses.

However, the specifics of these your medical condition really matter for establishing VA benefits, and considering the fact that your examiner is applying forensic skills to dive into your case, seeing your medication list can really help them understand the full scope of what disabilities you suffer from.

Here's some examples of how they do this:

- You may know that you have some level of cardiac disease, but if you're currently on a beta blocker, your examiner might suspect ischemic heart disease.
- If you're on a blood thinner, they may suspect a history of atrial fibrillation.
- If you're taking several, specific drugs used in a certain combination, your examiner might look for further information on whether or not you have heart failure.

4. Claim- Relevant Forms

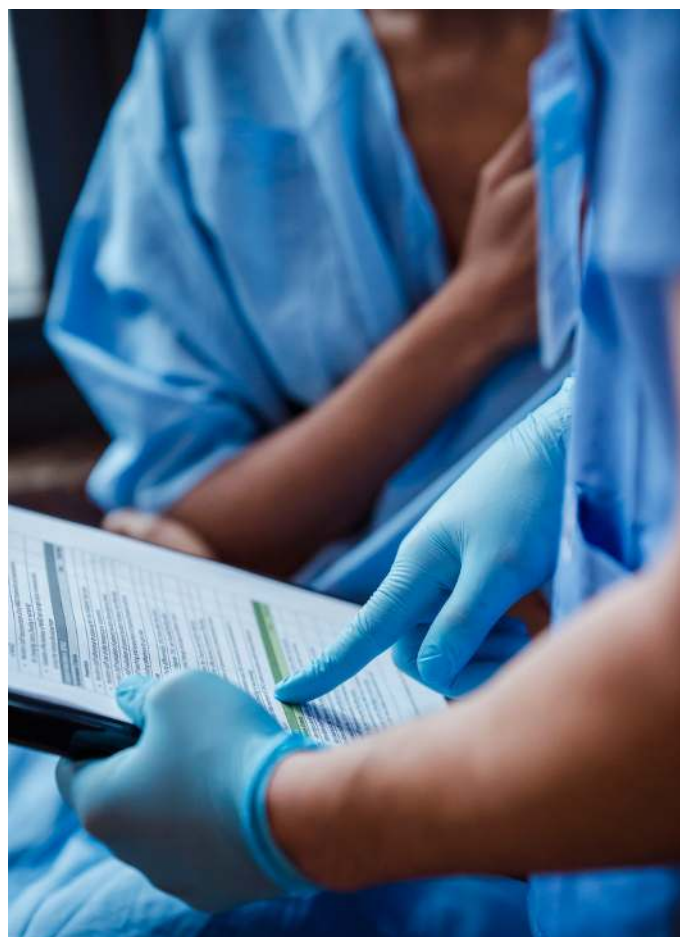
This is usually the exception rather than the rule, but sometimes the VA requests specific forms to complete your exam.

One common example is a hypertension log, which is used to document your blood pressure over several days. Specifically, the VA is looking for hypertension readings taken twice a day on three different days.

Another example that is not required, but tends to be helpful is a Disability Benefits Questionnaire completed by your physician, which is the same exam report that is going to be completed by your examiner.

5. Your Assistive Devices

Assistive devices are another important objective piece of evidence. Whether they are prescribed or over-the-counter, these devices will help your examiner more accurately understand the nature and extent of your VA disability claim.



Not only that, but it may help your examiner uncover important collateral information. For example, the presence of a knee brace may help the examiner document on instability, which is an important variable that has an impact on your rating.

Further, if your assistive device is critical for everyday movement, you may not be able to complete the C&P exam without it! For example, if you can't hear without your hearing aids, be sure to bring them with you.

6. Research Articles Supporting your Nexus

Sometimes, the connection between your disability claims and service is more subtle than might immediately be evident to your examiner. This is best described through a few examples:

- **Sleep Apnea and PTSD:** Many examiners might quickly dismiss this secondary relationship, reasoning that obstructive sleep apnea is an airway problem without a psychogenic origin. However, you may be able to show that PTSD caused you to gain weight, which served as an “intermediate step” in your development of sleep apnea.
- **Joint Arthritis and GERD:** Again, the relationship between arthritis in one of your joints and the GERD you suffer from may not be immediately apparent. However, patients with arthritis sometimes take large amounts of over-the-counter pain relief pills like anti-inflammatories to control their pain, which are known to cause alterations in stomach lining and can cause things like ulcers.

Finding research articles that help support these relationships may help sway your provider’s opinion, especially when it comes to secondary relationships that may be more subtle or indirect.

7. A Spouse, Partner, or Close Family Member

Bringing someone who is close to you (typically a family member) to your disability examination can help you fill in details as you’re being interviewed that you may miss along the way.

The information they give during your interview will also be considered subjective, but it certainly helps to have multiple people confirming the status of your disability claim and its impact on your everyday life. Layman evidence like this is required to be considered by your examiner as a part of their overall deliberation for your claim exam.

Checklist: 7 Essentials to Bring to Your C&P Exam

- ☐ **Relevant Medical Records:** hard copies for examiner review
- ☐ **Service Treatment Records:** highlight relevant parts.
- ☐ **Current Medication List:** ensure accuracy and updates.
- ☐ **Claim- Relevant Forms:** any specific requested documentation
- ☐ **Assistive Devices:** braces, hearing aids, etc.
- ☐ **Supporting Research:** studies backing your claim.
- ☐ **A Companion:** someone who can offer supporting details.

BE PREPARED TO MAKE YOUR EXAM AS THOROUGH AND INFORMED AS POSSIBLE!

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How to talk about your disability at your C&P exam

BY NATHAN COSTUIC,
RN, APRN, FNP-BC -
VA MEDICAL
EXAMINER

It's not surprising that most the veterans I see in my practice as a disability examiner suffer from a lack of knowledge – after all, establishing a service connected disability means navigating through an incredibly complex system, and education on the subject is often difficult to weed through.

To combat this knowledge gap and prepare you to successfully defend your claim, one of the most critical elements is learning how to approach your disability compensation and pension exam, which may be successful or not depending on what and how you communicate with your disability examiner during the disability benefits exam itself.

1. Establish your VA disability claim condition before you talk about its relationship to service.

To best understand how to communicate your disability to your assigned provider, it helps to first understand a few general principles about how examiners typically approach Compensation and Pension (aka C&P) exams. It's a common misconception that the first thing these examiners want to do is determine your claimed condition's potential causal relationship to military service.

In fact, this relationship may never be investigated if the examiner determines that your condition fails certain criteria (which are set by the VA and can usually be found in your medical records). The truth is that examiners are first attempting to establish whether or not you actually suffer from your claimed illness.

If your encounter fails to prove this, your examiner may fail to diagnose you with your claimed condition, which means evaluating that condition's service connection is not possible.

Here are some common reasons you may be fail to be diagnosed:

- Medical records fail to substantiate that you have ever been diagnosed with your claimed condition.
- Medical records fail to show that you are receiving care for your disability in an ongoing fashion (the VA calls this "chronicity").

- Sufficient diagnostic evaluation has not been completed by your healthcare provider to substantially rule out organic causes for exclusionary diagnoses like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Irritable Bowel Syndrome.
- Your condition fails to meet certain disease-specific criteria. One example is Diabetes Mellitus, for which the VA requires two consecutively high Hgb A1c medical tests reading greater than >6.5%. (See our directory of most common disabilities to see if your condition meets the criteria for a VA diagnosis.)

Veterans I see often simply assume they are diagnosed with a condition without realizing the VA medical center may not see it the same way. Whenever discussing your condition, you should proactively be highlighting the various ways your condition's medical evidence meets such criteria.

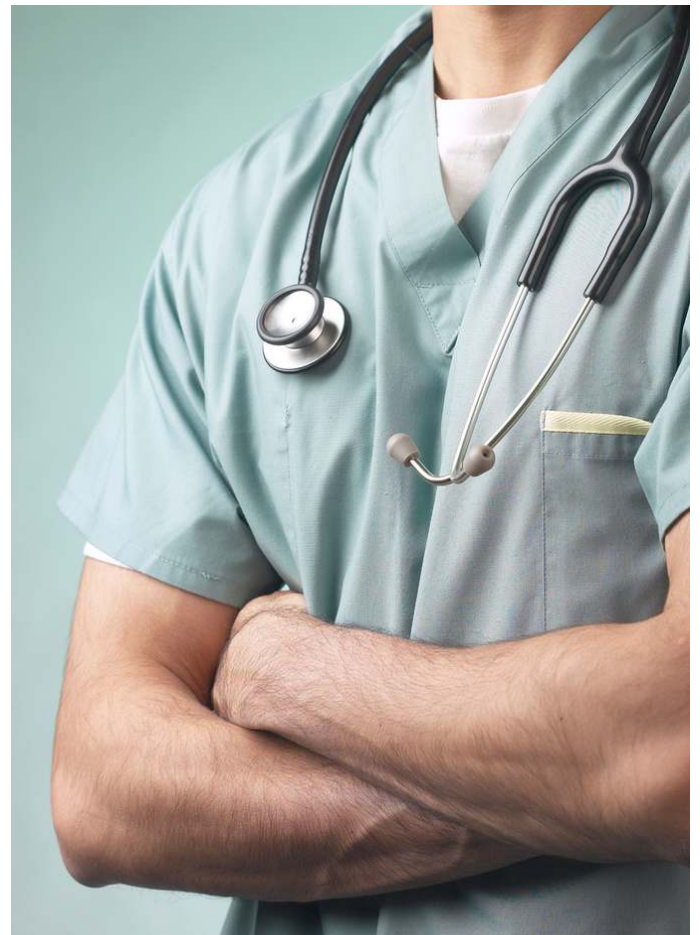


2. Don't let your examiner rush you

It's not uncommon for veterans to regale me with horror stories of times they were assessed for complex conditions in less than 5 minutes with no physical examination.

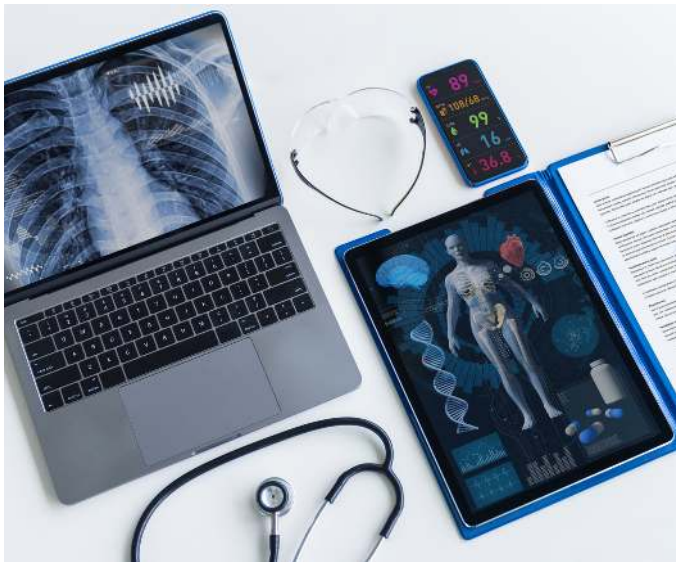
If you've ever looked at a Disability Benefits Questionnaire, there are a lot of questions on there, and not all of them can be answered by just looking at your medical records. The best way to communicate the full medical history and symptoms regarding your disability is to brush up on the Disability Benefits Questionnaire most relevant to your condition. This will help you understand what information the VA cares most about for adjudicating VA claims so that you can communicate these specifics to your provider.

Further, if you're getting the sense that the VA claims medical provider is rushing to complete the doctor's appointment or not paying full attention, you can simply say, "I'd like to read through some of the points I thought may be important in relation to my disability."



If you have an orthopedic exam, you can also perform some simple maneuvers to show relevant limitations in your range of motion (which is important in properly establishing a full VA disability claim rating).

Hopefully, when the VA provider hears you mentioning highly specific details, this will clue them in to the fact that you're educated on the subject and ready to provide all relevant information. But if all else fails, you may consider challenging the VA for administering a bad claim exam (full guide [here](#)).



3. Be specific and honest in answering the examiner's questions.

Many of the veterans I encounter think that exaggerating their symptoms will help them to attain a higher VA rating. However, this is rarely the case considering the fact that a VA rating relies mostly on objective information (like range of motion), rather than a subjective report like pain.

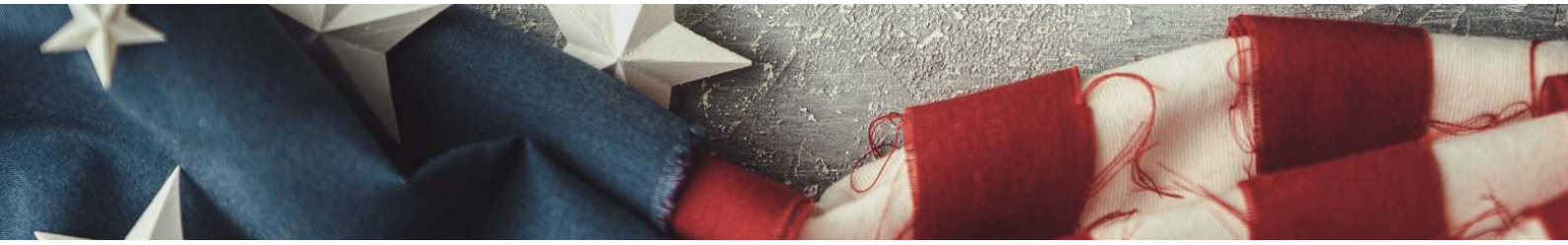
Not only that, but disease syndromes in veterans usually present with an expected constellation of findings, so it's often easy for the VA provider to tell if you are exaggerating your pain and other symptoms, which can damage your credibility and potentially the success of your claim exam.

You also don't want to underplay your symptoms, which is another temptation many veterans face. Instead, just be specific. If the examiner asks you about functional limitations that negatively impact you, tell him of particular everyday life activities you have a hard time engaging in due to your disability, especially if they are work-related or impact your life with your spouse.

4. Help your examiner rule out noncontributory causes.

A successful VA claim exam is heavily dependent on the VA doctor determining, as a result of your medical exam, that your disability was "more likely than not" caused by military service.





To do this means being able to confidently say that other potential causes for your disability have been ruled out as contributors (or at least that they are weaker contributors than the relationship you've put forth in your claim). The best way to explain this is with some examples:

- If you suffer from sleep apnea, whose number one cause is excess weight gain, you'll want to show how another service connected condition is what's responsible for your weight gain as an "intermediate step." Alternatively, if it is clinically accurate, you may show that the root cause for your sleep apnea is in your upper airway due to sinus issues.
- For migraines, you want to explain that you don't have any of the classic risk factors like family history, heavy smoking or drinking, or the effects of advancing age.
- GERD diagnoses should rule out contributors like the use of certain medications, smoking history, hiatal hernia, or poor diet.

One relationship I see fail frequently is claiming that an injury in one service-connected joint that is causing disability in another – let's use the example of an old right knee injury causing eventual pain in the other knee due to a compensation in the gait.

Many examiners opine that injury in one joint does not cause injury in another, reasoning that something like arthritis typically does not "spread" from one joint to another, and that some other unknown injury is the more likely contributor.

One good way to approach this is to mention whether you have any instability in the service-connected knee (which tends to be common in knee injuries) that has caused you to traumatically fall on the other knee.

Above all, build rapport with your examiner to help win your disability compensation.

The advice above may encourage you to think that you should come into your VA claim exam with guns blazing – for your own sake, don't make that mistake!

Keep in mind that, at the end of the day, your examiner is ultimately trying to determine the truth regarding your claimed condition. Instead of telling your examiner, *"I think this is what's going on,"* try asking them, *"Do you think this is what's going on?"*

Not only does this show intellectual humility, but it will give you insight into how your examiner thinks, which can be valuable for furnishing a productive discussion about your disability.

Sometimes, you may have a condition which is complex, and you may not be sure the best way to communicate it with your examiner.

In this case, it may be worth hiring a veterans disability attorney who can help guide you through the overall process of starting a claim, getting a positive VA claim exam report, and winning your claim.

QUICK TIPS: TALKING ABOUT YOUR DISABILITY

- **Be Specific:** Detail daily struggles and work impacts.
- **Stay Honest:** Avoid exaggerating or downplaying symptoms.
- **Take Your Time:** Don't let the examiner rush you.
- **Rule Out Other Causes:** Clarify why military service is the main contributor.

A close-up photograph of a silver laptop keyboard with a black smartphone resting on it. The phone's screen is white and blank. The background is a solid blue color.

How to use technology to help pass a C&P exam

BY NATHAN COSTUIC, RN, APRN, FNP-BC - VA MEDICAL EXAMINER

Picture this: you are welcomed into the office by your VA C&P Disability Examiner, given a short introduction to what you'll be covering during the visit, and after a few questions, you notice that your examiner starts writing down information while you're still speaking.

It seems rude, because even though they appear to be listening and asking good clarifying questions, they're still spending much of their time staring at the screen in front of them during the exam and typing away. This is a great example of just how technologically-driven the VA Disability process is.

But why is this?

Consider the fact that your examiner has been tasked by the VA to gather copious amounts of information in relation to each of your claimed conditions.

It's impossible to ask the 20+ detailed questions needed to properly evaluate your knee issue and then write it down at a later time. Because of this, the best examiners write it down as you tell it to them – especially if they are interested in being as detailed as possible.

So if technology is so central to the VA Disability process, how can you make that work to your advantage? What tools can you use to ensure better success leading up to and during your meeting with your examiner?

After three years of performing these exams, I've noticed that the most prepared veterans are often the most successful at establishing service connection for their claims, so let's dive into some best practices and ideas.

#1: Determine When and When Not to Use the ACE Telehealth Process

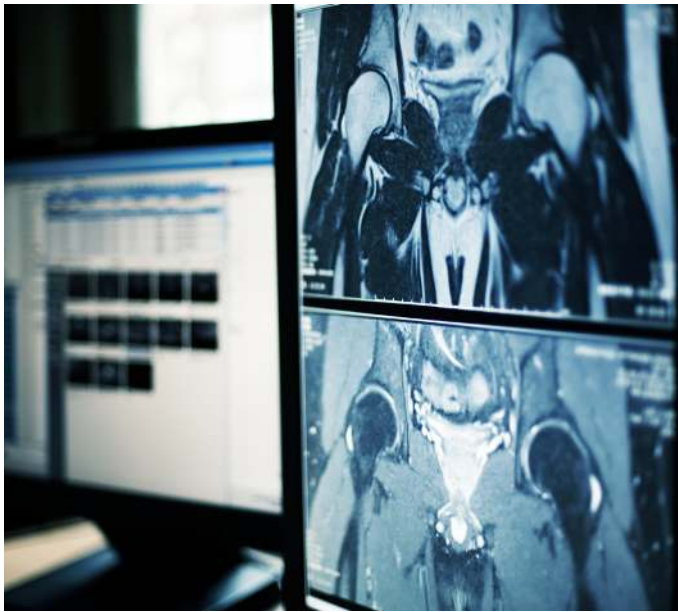
Several years ago, the VA began allowing the use of telehealth for the completion of some types of disability exams, otherwise known as the ACE process.



Lots of exams are considered “ACE-eligible,” but in my experience as an examiner, there are a few that would be better served with in-person face-to-face examinations... even if the VA says you could conduct them via telehealth!

What are those exams?

The best illustrator of this point is a Heart Examination. If I'm evaluating a veteran for cardiovascular condition, there's a lot of information that I cannot glean just from looking at records and talking to them over the phone – I need to see them!



Questions I need visual answers for are things like:

- How is the veteran's respiratory effort?
- What did they look like walking up the stairs to the clinic?
- What color is the skin on their lower extremities?
- How much swelling do they have on their ankles?

These questions can be critical in substantiating your true clinical status and the functional impact of your heart condition.

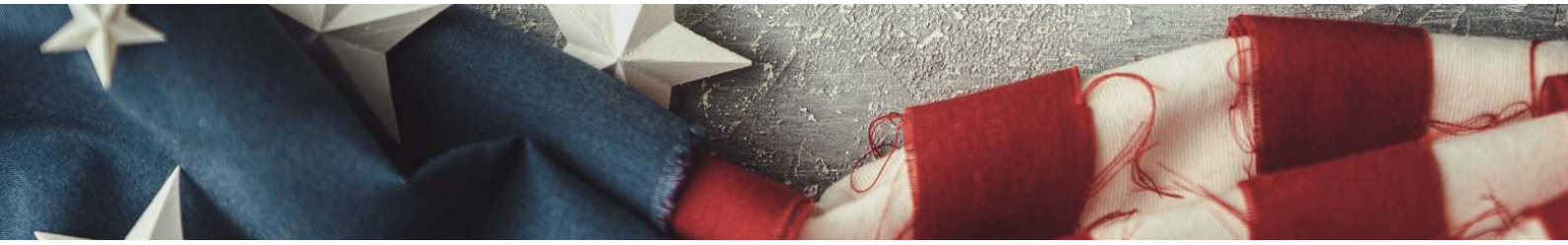
For the same reasoning, I am of the opinion that thyroid, Parkinson's, seizures/epilepsy, and Aid/Attendance exams should all be conducted in-person.

In some cases, it may make sense to perform these as telehealth exams, but only if there were copious amounts of information regarding your physical exam findings (this is almost never the case).

If you've been scheduled for an ACE process exam, but would rather prefer one in-person, you can request that the VA reschedule your appointment as one that is conducted face-to-face.

If you're trying to understand when that's advisable, the best thing to do is to simply consider whether or not your disability would benefit from direct visualization/physical examination.





#2: Have Patient Portals Readily Available

I've mentioned before that the VA's official guidance when it comes to bringing anything to your disability exam is to not – they expect that all your paperwork and documentation should be submitted before the exam via official channels and then be available to the examiner on the day of examination itself. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

It is not uncommon for me to be examining a veteran and be missing one critical piece of information. One example is that of a veteran I was examining for diabetes: the VA requires two separate Hemoglobin A1c lab values > 6.5 in order to confirm a diagnosis of diabetes. For whatever reason, despite the fact that she had already submitted this documentation via formal channels as requested, they were not available in my file during the exam.

Thankfully, she was the kind of person who kept a close eye on her health and was able to instantly log into one of her patient portals on her phone, find some recent A1c labs, and show them to me during the exam.

You might be surprised at the regularity with which things like this happen: a knee MRI, an echocardiogram, or an endoscopy procedure note is missing and the veteran is able to quickly pull up what's needed on their patient portal app to ensure consistent corroboration regarding the claimed condition.

Having access to these sorts of patient portals can also help when your examiner may be looking for a very specific piece of information that you couldn't have anticipated needing to prepare prior to your exam.



If you're not too familiar with these kinds of apps or websites, it's helpful to know that most doctor's offices and health systems (including the VA) upload your records to the cloud so you can access them on your phone or a laptop.

Just ask your doctor's office if they have anything like this in place and how you might access it. If you're in the VA system, you'll be using My HealtheVet. You may also consider bringing your laptop to an exam for even quicker navigation and ease of visibility.

#3: Use Monitoring Apps for Health Tracking

Similar to the above point, it's often helpful for an examiner to see a log of your symptoms or other biometric data.

They can use data like this to form a more accurate opinion as to the severity of your disability. Examples of this are migraine or pain diaries, blood pressure logs, CPAP machine recordings, or continuous glucose monitoring devices.

In one instance, a veteran had access to their CPAP machine recordings (a medical device used for sleep apnea) on their phone, and I was able to substantiate their adherence in sticking to the treatment.

If you use a CPAP, your manufacturer likely offers cloud data like this. Another example is migraine diaries – while they are still technically subjective information, they allow an examiner like myself to add information to the clinical picture about your headaches.

Sometimes obtaining this information can be automated, like having your smartwatch record your oxygen or heart rate at various moments and logging when they're abnormal.

#4: Take pictures!

Pictures are especially helpful for conditions that have significant flare-ups. For example, one veteran I encountered had a skin condition that only presented a few times a year. On the day of the exam, he didn't have any abnormal skin findings, but he was able to show me a picture of his rash at various moments in time that allowed me to choose an accurate diagnosis.

If you have a lower back condition that tends to result in spasms which make your pain much worse and affect the way you walk and complete daily activities (this is common in many lumbar conditions).

You can use photographic evidence in this way to give your examiner a much broader picture (pun intended) of the functional limitations associated with your disability.

QUICK TIPS: USING TECH FOR C&P EXAMS

- **Choose In-Person When Needed:** ACE telehealth isn't ideal for all exams.
- **Use Patient Portals:** Quickly access important records.
- **Track Health Data:** Logs like symptom diaries strengthen your claim.
- **Bring Photos:** Show flare-ups for clearer evidence



C&P Exam Tips for Sleep Disorder Disability Claims

Sleep disorders can be difficult to prove during a VA disability exam due to their episodic nature and subjective symptoms. These disorders often connect to service through secondary relationships, such as sleep issues stemming from PTSD or other service-connected conditions. Demonstrating this connection can make a significant difference in your claim's success.

Key Points to Include in Your Exam:

- **Describe Sleep Patterns:** Clearly detail your sleep disturbances, including trouble falling or staying asleep, nightmares, or frequent waking.
- **Show Daily Impact:** Highlight how sleep issues affect your day-to-day life, such as fatigue, reduced concentration, or decreased work performance.
- **Connect to Service:** Explain any service-connected conditions that contribute to your sleep problems, like chronic pain or mental health issues.
- **Provide Treatment Records:** Bring any CPAP compliance logs, doctor's notes, or therapy records to show that your sleep issues have been documented and treated.

Pro Tip: Use a sleep diary or data from wearable devices to provide consistent, objective evidence of your sleep issues.



C&P Exam Tips for Exposure Related Claims

Exposure to harmful substances during military service can lead to long-term health complications. Establishing a service connection for exposure-related claims requires diligent documentation and clear evidence linking your health issues to your service.

Key Steps to Strengthen Your Claim:

- **Document Exposure Clearly:** Gather service records, testimonies, or other evidence proving exposure to chemicals, toxins, or hazardous environments during service.
- **Highlight Secondary Conditions:** Include any health problems that developed or worsened due to exposure, such as respiratory conditions or cancers.
- **Bring Medical Evidence:** Present lab reports, imaging, and diagnoses that corroborate the link between your health condition and exposure.
- **Show Consistent Symptoms:** Maintain a log or diary that tracks ongoing symptoms and their impact, providing a clearer picture over time.

Quick Tip: Cite relevant medical studies showing how similar exposures have affected other veterans, which can reinforce your case.



C&P Exam Tips for “Invisible” Disabilities

Conditions that aren't always visible or consistently symptomatic can be difficult to prove during a VA claim. Despite their subtle nature, these conditions may significantly impact your quality of life and work performance.

Key Points for Your Exam:

- **Explain Episodic Symptoms:** Make sure to describe conditions that have fluctuating visibility and how they manifest during flare-ups.
- **Illustrate Impact:** Detail how the condition affects your daily activities, even when not visible, such as difficulty standing, pain, or cognitive challenges.
- **Show Evidence of Flare-Ups:** Bring photos, videos, or logs documenting episodes when the condition is at its worst.
- **Provide Third-Party Statements:** Include letters or testimonies from family members, friends, or coworkers who have witnessed the impact of your condition to support your claim.

Takeaway: Providing detailed descriptions and tangible evidence of inconspicuous conditions is crucial for a successful claim.



Tips for Effective C&P Exam Documentation

Thorough and effective documentation can be the difference between a successful VA claim and a denial. Comprehensive and accurate records that reflect your condition, align with your statements, and showcase the impact on your daily life play a crucial role in the outcome of your claim. Preparing well and knowing what to highlight can strengthen your case significantly.

Documentation Essentials:

- **Be Comprehensive:** Include all relevant medical history, recent diagnostics, and ongoing treatments.
- **Ensure Consistency:** Make sure your verbal statements match your medical records for credibility.
- **Highlight Functional Impairments:** Describe how your condition limits daily tasks or affects your work performance.
- **Detail Symptom Progression:** Show how your condition has changed or worsened over time to support chronicity.
- **Bring Supporting Documentation:** Include letters from doctors or specialists that reinforce your condition's impact.

Quick Reminder: Always bring hard copies of crucial documents in case they're missing from the examiner's file.



C&P Exam Tips for Older Veterans

As veterans age, service-connected conditions often worsen or are complicated by new health issues. Recognizing and addressing these age-related changes during your C&P exam can significantly strengthen your claim and provide a clearer picture of your current health status.

Important Things to Remember:

- **Discuss Age-Exacerbated Symptoms:** Highlight how your service-connected conditions have changed or worsened over time due to aging.
- **Provide Detailed History:** Include a comprehensive overview of how your condition has progressed, focusing on recent changes.
- **Ensure Records Reflect Current Impact:** Verify that your documentation shows the true extent of your condition's current impact.
- **Include Any New Age-Related Complications:** Mention any new symptoms or conditions that interact with your original service-connected disability.

Pro Tip: Specific, real-life examples of how your condition limits daily activities or affects your quality of life can make your case more compelling.



C&P Exam Tips for PACT Act and Agent Orange Claims

The PACT Act has expanded opportunities for veterans exposed to Agent Orange to claim benefits for hypertension. Properly presenting your claim under these updated guidelines can be crucial to securing approval and maximizing your benefits.

Key Details for Your Claim:

- **Leverage the PACT Act:** Hypertension is now recognized as associated with Agent Orange exposure, making more veterans eligible for compensation.
- **Provide Proof of Diagnosis:** Submit medical test results that confirm high blood pressure, meeting the VA's diagnostic criteria for hypertension.
- **Highlight Service Records:** Ensure your documentation includes service records that prove your exposure to Agent Orange.
- **Emphasize Related Conditions:** Note any secondary conditions linked to hypertension that could affect your overall claim.

Remember: If you were previously denied benefits, consider refiling under the updated PACT Act guidelines for a stronger case.



C&P Exam Tips for Mental Health Claims

Mental health C&P exams can be challenging, requiring honest and detailed communication about how your symptoms affect your daily life. Proper preparation helps ensure a thorough and supportive evaluation that reflects the full impact of your condition.

Best Practices:

- **Be Honest and Detailed:** Share the complete extent of your symptoms, including severity, frequency, and duration. Avoid exaggerating or downplaying your condition.
- **Explain Daily Impact:** Describe how mental health issues affect your work, relationships, and personal activities. Be specific about limitations or difficulties in routine tasks.
- **Include Therapy Records:** Bring notes or records from therapy or counseling sessions that demonstrate ongoing treatment and provide additional context for your condition.
- **Note Symptom Triggers:** Identify triggers or situations that exacerbate your symptoms to give the examiner a clearer understanding of your condition.

Key Tip: Consistency between your oral statements and medical records is crucial for credibility and accurate assessment during your exam.



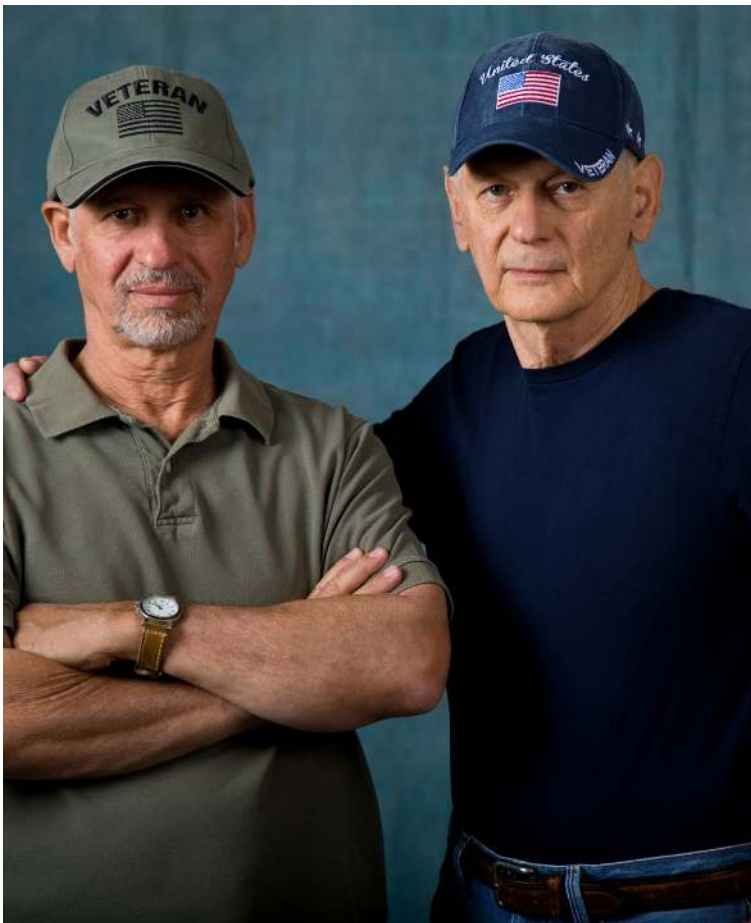
Testimonials

“After being denied any help from the VA two times, a fellow veteran I served with during the Vietnam War referred me to Hill and Ponton. From my very first call with them I had hope that Hill and Ponton would be able help me. They took care of everything that needed to be submitted and kept me informed every step of the way. I found Hill and Ponton are very professional and compassionate. Thank you, Stephanie Palacio, Brian Hill and all the support staff for a great outcome. I commend you for the service and hope you are providing veterans.”

Thomas Allen (New York)

“My experience with Hill & Ponton was excellent. Melanie Williams and her staff worked tirelessly on my claim until I was awarded 100% disability. There were times that I said to Melanie “Do you think we have a chance to win this claim”, and she always assured me that if the approach we were trying didn’t work, that there were other things we could try. And she was right. If you are looking for the best law firm for your VA Disability case, you will be very happy with the results you get working with Hill & Ponton.”

Chuck (Wisconsin)



“Nothing but professionals. They were hands on from day one. I will highly recommend them. Very honest and they know how to make things happen. Could never have gotten his claim approved on our own. Thank You for being there for this veteran.”

R. Patt

Disability Claim Resources



[VA Disability Calculator](#)

Calculate the compensation you should be receiving.

[Toxic Exposure Map](#)

Find out what toxic exposures were at different military installations

[VA Claims Course](#)

Step-by-step legal team approved course on filing a VA claim

[YouTube Channel](#)

Hundreds of videos to help you with every step of the process

[V.E.T.S. Advantage](#)

Our weekly newsletter, jam packed with great tips and advice

[Guide to VA Claims Book](#)

Our bestselling book with step-by-step instructions for filing a claim



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