

# First VA Claim Evidence Checklist

Companion web guide: Evidence Needed for Your First VA Disability Claim

Web guide URL: <https://driveonpodcast.com/evidence-needed-for-your-first-va-disability-claim>

## BEFORE YOU START

This is a practical starting checklist, not an exhaustive list. Your claim may need different or additional documents. Checking every box does not mean your claim is complete, approved, rated a certain way, or processed faster.

Use this worksheet to organize a first VA disability claim. It is not a promise of an outcome and is not a substitute for current VA instructions. The free web resource contains the useful information; this PDF copy is for convenience and is not a gate.

Drive On Podcast is an educational resource, not VA, a VSO, an accredited claims agent, an attorney, or a medical provider. This checklist is not legal or medical advice. VA rules and forms change. Verify current steps on VA.gov before you act.

## Official VA starting points

- Evidence needed: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>
- How to file: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>
- Intent to file: <https://www.va.gov/resources/your-intent-to-file-a-va-claim/>
- Accredited help: <https://www.va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/>

Still serving? If you are in the pre-discharge window, see VA's BDD / pre-discharge page instead of treating this post-service checklist as your primary guide: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/when-to-file/pre-discharge-claim/>

## 1) CLAIM BASICS

- ☐ I am preparing an original (first) post-service disability claim (not an appeals deep-dive, rating-increase strategy, or BDD walkthrough)
- ☐ I know which condition(s) I plan to claim
- ☐ I understand evidence may be submitted by me or gathered with my permission; evidence still matters either way
- ☐ I will confirm current forms and instructions on VA.gov (do not rely on old printouts alone)

## 2) SEPARATION DOCUMENTS

- ☐ Locate DD214 or other separation documents
- ☐ Make a clear copy (keep the original safe)
- ☐ Confirm name and service dates are readable
- ☐ Decide: submit a copy myself or give VA permission to gather what I am missing (follow VA's current instructions)

## 3) SERVICE TREATMENT RECORDS (STRs)

- ☐ Identify where my STRs live (use VA's current guidance)
- ☐ Request or gather STRs that relate to claimed conditions
- ☐ Note gaps (lost records, missing pages) so I can explain or follow up
- ☐ Decide: submit what I have or authorize VA help gathering STRs where allowed

## 4) MEDICAL EVIDENCE FOR CURRENT DISABILITY

- ☐ List current providers (VA and private) related to claimed conditions
- ☐ Gather recent treatment notes, diagnoses, imaging, or other clinical records that show the condition now
- ☐ Gather records that help show functional impact, as applicable
- ☐ If private records are hard to get, review VA's instructions for giving permission to gather records
- ☐ Keep a simple inventory of what I submitted and when

## 5) LAY / BUDDY STATEMENTS (OPTIONAL)

- ☐ Decide whether a personal statement would help
- ☐ Ask someone who knows me for a factual witness statement if useful
- ☐ Use current VA statement forms (confirm 21-10210 / 21-4138 on VA.gov) or a clear written statement
- ☐ Buddy statements: firsthand observations only (not medical conclusions)

## 6) ORIGINAL-CLAIM THREE PARTS (SELF-CHECK)

For each claimed condition:

- ☐ Current disability (usually medical evidence)
- ☐ In-service event, injury, or disease
- ☐ Link between service and current disability (confirm details on VA.gov)
- ☐ If a piece is thin or missing, plan follow-up (not automatic denial)

## 7) INTENT TO FILE / TIMING

- ☐ Read VA intent-to-file page: <https://www.va.gov/resources/your-intent-to-file-a-va-claim/>
- ☐ Paper path: consider Form 21-0966 if it fits: <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-0966/>
- ☐ Online path: start can protect effective date; complete within 365 days (confirm on VA.gov)
- ☐ Set reminders for evidence deadlines and VA requests

## 8) CHOOSE A FILING PATH

Confirm options: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>

- ☐ Online via VA.gov
- ☐ Mail (commonly VA Form 21-526EZ; confirm current form on VA.gov)
- ☐ In person at a VA regional office
- ☐ Fax (use live numbers on VA.gov)
- ☐ With an accredited representative / trained professional

## 9) BEFORE YOU FILE

- ☐ Names, contact info, and service details match my documents
- ☐ Claimed conditions are listed clearly
- ☐ Evidence packet is labeled / organized
- ☐ I know whether I am submitting records now, authorizing VA to gather, or both
- ☐ I have copies of everything I send
- ☐ If using a representative, appointment paperwork is handled (confirm 21-22 / 21-22a on VA.gov)

## 10) AFTER YOU FILE

- ☐ Watch mail and VA.gov / VA account messages for requests
- ☐ Respond to evidence requests promptly
- ☐ Track the window VA gives for additional evidence (confirm on VA.gov)
- ☐ Attend scheduled exams; reschedule through official channels if needed
- ☐ Do not ignore development letters

## 11) GET HELP IF YOU NEED IT

- ☐ Consider getting help from an accredited representative
- ☐ Find one: <https://www.va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/>
- ☐ Ask whether help is free or fee-based before signing
- ☐ Remember: Drive On can educate; Drive On cannot represent your claim

## QUICK LINKS

1. Evidence needed: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>
2. How to file: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>
3. Intent to file: <https://www.va.gov/resources/your-intent-to-file-a-va-claim/>
4. Form 21-0966: <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-0966/>
5. Accredited representative finder: <https://www.va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/>
6. Pre-discharge / BDD (pointer only): <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/when-to-file/pre-discharge-claim/>
7. VA Form 21-526EZ (PDF): <https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-526EZ-ARE.pdf>

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<https://driveonpodcast.com/evidence-needed-for-your-first-va-disability-claim>