

# VA Compensation & Pension (C&P) Physical Examinations

## Unofficial Guide for Veterans in Thailand

Tips for maximizing your Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requested Compensation and Pension (C&P) Physical Examination for disability compensation benefits.

**This unofficial guide is focused solely on VA requested C&P physical exams** and not on the entire VA disability compensation claims process. As a physician who has performed a number of VA requested physical examinations, I have found that some veterans arrive well-prepared for the examination while others have not. A VA requested C&P physical exam is for a medical evaluation, and not for treatment. Being thoroughly prepared may lead to a favorable disability rating decision from the VA and possibly avoid the need to appeal one or more VA disability claim rating decisions (which can take years). There is always something new to learn about this process. I have compiled a list of tips and advice I have learned to-date. This guide is not a substitute for official assistance but may benefit some of you who will have this examination.

1. **Be prepared to pay 100% up front (out-of-pocket) for a VA requested C&P physical examination** and then submit a claim to the VA Foreign Medical Program (FMP) for payment consideration. Some medical diagnostic tests can be quite expensive, so plan accordingly.
2. **Obtain copies of your service and private treatment records**, and organize them by topic in chronological order. Also obtain pertinent diagnostic films such as MRIs, X-Rays, CT Scans, etc., and other evidence pertinent to your disability claim.
3. Do not assume that because you have submitted a copy of your medical records and other evidence to the VA or because you were previously seen at a VA hospital, that you do not need those records for the VA requested physical exam. For example, if the VA deems the C&P exam report is insufficient for rating purposes due to insufficient evidence provided by the veteran, the VA may not search through your entire VA c-file to locate that evidence. Worse yet is if the VA has misplaced or erroneously destroyed part or all of your records. During the VA requested C&P exam there will not be sufficient time to search through many records to find dates. **Be proactive and help yourself by writing down important dates ahead of time and bringing those with you to your examination.**
4. **For each medical condition, write a brief timeline.** For example, the date first having symptoms, the date first diagnosed by a doctor, the date of surgery or treatment. The VA C&P physical exam Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) forms do not provide much space to write a lot of information, so just an outline is all that is typically needed.
5. **Review beforehand the VA C&P DBQ(s) the doctor will fill out.** This will give you an idea of what the doctor will do and the questions they will pose to you. Again, please write down important dates before the exam but do not make up a date if you are unsure. Important dates include:
  - a. When were you first diagnosed with that condition by a doctor and where?

- b. When and where did you have surgeries?
  - c. When did you have an injury?
6. **Please bring a list of your medications, including dosages and how you take them.** You should have this written down anyway, not just for the disability exam.
  7. For each evaluation you have done, one of the most important parts is how that problem limits your ability to work. For example, if you have arthritis of the knees, then it might prevent you from walking long distances or standing for prolonged periods of time. The focus is on how the condition limits work related activities. **Think about and write down the points for each problem.**
  8. **If you are service connected for a condition and are requesting an increase in rating, please bring in the pertinent VA rating decision that awarded your current disability rating.** The VA uses specific legal criteria in U.S.C. Title 38 to award a disability rating, and the rating decision will explain to you why the VA awarded that rating. Prior to filing a disability compensation claim for an increase in rating, please review the VA rating criteria (Schedule for Rating Disabilities) for that condition to see if you meet the criteria for a higher rating.
  9. For most cases, **please already have your medical condition diagnosed before you come in for the C&P examination and bring in the medical note or test result that states what your diagnosis is.** For example, if you think you have obstructive sleep apnea but have never been tested for it and come in for the VA requested exam, it will not be possible to complete the respective DBQ. There are a number of DBQs like this. This means you need to do your homework. Find out from your doctor what your diagnoses are. Know what is medically wrong with you and write it down. Keep a list for yourself. If you had a sleep test that you say shows you have obstructive sleep apnea, but do not bring the test result to the examination, the doctor cannot write obstructive sleep apnea on the VA DBQ without seeing that test result.
  10. **More is not always better on PTSD exams.** Some veterans want to document as many bad things as possible on their examination that they have witnessed, with the generally incorrect belief that the more they write the higher the disability rating will be. It is not seeing something bad that is important on the PTSD examination. It is how that bad thing affects you. Most of the veterans I have seen who were granted service connection for PTSD had only one or two stressor events. **Writing down more typically will not give you a higher rating.**
  11. **Know medically how your condition may be service connected (potential medical nexus to military service).** Please do not guess or base it on loose personal opinion. For some conditions, such as Agent Orange related conditions, there is already a list of approved presumptive medical conditions on the VA website. For some questionable medical relationships, the VA requires references from a reputable medical journal or textbook to accept the association. There is no time to do this kind of research during the physical examination. Print out any references you think are relevant so the examining doctor can review it and potentially include it with the examination report. You generally do not need these references if there is a clearly documented service related problem.

12. Be honest. **The VA often requests repeated examinations over time and if the veteran's story is different each time (other than changes in the medical condition) there can be evidence credibility problems for a claimant.** A physician doing the examination who detects inconsistencies is required to annotate these on the exam results. Some of the examinations require specific diagnostic tests to determine if the exam really reflects the medical problems alleged by a veteran.
13. **Know that if you have a future examination of an existing VA service connected condition the rating may be reduced or discontinued.** One such example is lung cancer. A veteran may have been awarded 100% disability due to lung cancer for a year and then will be reevaluated after a year. If the reevaluation shows no signs of cancer, the VA will likely propose to reduce the rating.
14. **Once the VA C&P exam reports are finished please double-check your copies for errors.** Doctors make mistakes too and sometimes an error in a Social Security number, a misspelled name or an error in a date or disease can occur. If you detect an error, contact the doctor as soon as possible; it can be corrected.
15. **Once an examination is completed and the results submitted to the VA, the VA will at some point issue a rating decision.** That said, do not expect or ask a doctor to keep adding on information later via addendums to that same VA requested C&P exam report that has already been submitted to the VA. Usually, once an examination is completed, the examining doctor has nothing more to do with the case and will not be contacted by the VA; **the VA will contact the veteran directly.**
16. **The VA is the one to make the rating decision on a disability compensation claim.** If you disagree with part or all of the VA rating decision, do not go back to the doctor who performed the VA C&P physical examination--the examining doctor is no longer involved in the case. Instead, see [VA's website on how to appeal a decision](#).

#### Final Notes:

- Others are better trained at giving advice about filing VA disability compensation and pension claims and appeals, but the above tips from a physician's perspective will hopefully help your VA requested C&P physical examination to be smoother and more productive. Remember, a VA requested C&P physical exam is for a medical evaluation, and not treatment. Arrive prepared. Keep unrelated dialogue to a minimum. Help your examining doctor to help you.
- To provide clarity to a common misconception, veteran "self-requested" disability physical exams are not official VA requested C&P physical exams, even when a VA DBQ is used as evidence with a Fully Developed Claim (FDC). In VA parlance, "self-requested" disability exams are known as Independent Medical Opinions (IMO). Increasingly, the VA seems to be requesting C&P physical exams even when a veteran has already filed an FDC that included an Independent Medical Opinion using a VA DBQ.
- Veterans residing in Thailand are encouraged to review the VA section of the U.S. Embassy's (Thailand) Federal Benefits webpage located under U.S. Citizen Services. Their webpage contains direct links to VA and other useful

information: <https://th.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/federal-benefits/veterans-affairs/>.

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