

CLAIM PREPARATION IN ONE PAGE

Build the evidence, organize the file, and submit the correct claim without losing the thread.



PURPOSE	MAIN FORM	BEST NEXT TOOL
Prepare a complete, readable claim file	VA Form 21-526EZ	Claim File Readiness Check

READ FIRST

A strong filing is not the biggest stack of records. It is a complete file that clearly shows what condition is claimed, which legal path applies, what evidence supports each element, and where the reviewer can find it.

01 • PROTECT THE DATE

START WITH THE DATE AND THE FILING LANE

1

Consider an Intent to File

An Intent to File can preserve a potential effective date while the evidence packet is being assembled. It is not the completed claim.

2

Identify the claim purpose

New condition, secondary condition, increase, BDD, and section 1151 claims do not ask the VA to decide the same question.

3

Use the correct form

Most new disability, increase, secondary, and section 1151 claims use VA Form 21-526EZ. Post-decision review lanes use different forms.

02 • BUILD THE RECORD

PUT THE REQUIRED ELEMENTS IN THE FILE

A

Current disability

Competent medical evidence showing the condition or functional impairment that exists now.

B

Service or qualifying basis

An event, injury, exposure, presumptive route, service-connected primary condition, or other valid path.

C

Medical link when required

A reasoned nexus opinion addressing the exact direct, secondary-causation, or aggravation question.

D

Severity and impact

Symptoms, frequency, duration, test results, flare-ups, and effects on work and daily activities.

03 • ASSEMBLE THE PACKET

MAKE THE EVIDENCE EASY TO FOLLOW



Name every file clearly

Use the condition, document type, provider or author, and date.



Include a one-page claim overview

List each claimed condition, theory, and the documents that support it.



Remove duplicates and irrelevant pages

More pages do not help when they hide the evidence that matters.



Confirm forms, signatures, and dates

Use the current official form and complete every required field.



Save proof of submission

Keep the confirmation page, upload receipt, fax confirmation, or date-stamped copy.

04 • FINAL CHECK

USE THE SITE'S FILING TOOLS

NEED A PATH?

The Guided Filing Tool starts with the claim situation and routes the veteran toward the appropriate condition and filing material.

</help/file-claim>

THEN

NEED A COMPLETENESS CHECK?

The Claim File Readiness Check grades the contents of the file from the veteran's answers. It does not predict an outcome.

</dc/claim-readiness>

THE RULE

Complete, relevant, and easy to locate beats a disorganized document dump. This guide explains preparation, not whether a particular veteran should file.

