

WHICH FILING PATH FITS THE SITUATION?



Start with what the VA has already decided about this condition.

FIRST QUESTION Has VA decided this condition?	SECOND QUESTION Was it granted or denied?	FORM CHECK Use the lane-specific official form
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READ FIRST The condition's history determines the filing lane. A new condition, an increased rating, and a previously denied condition cannot be treated as the same request.

DECISION 01

HAS THE VA EVER DECIDED THIS CONDITION?

NO, NEVER DECIDED

This begins as an initial claim for that condition, even if the veteran already has other service-connected disabilities.

Usually VA Form 21-526EZ

OR

YES, ALREADY DECIDED

Move to the next question. The correct path depends on whether the VA granted or denied the condition.

Read the prior decision first

DECISION 02

WHAT DID THE PRIOR DECISION DO?

G

Granted, but the condition worsened

This is generally an increase claim. The issue is current severity under the rating schedule, not a new nexus to service.

D

Denied, and new evidence exists

A Supplemental Claim may be the correct review lane. It requires new and relevant evidence addressing the prior denial.

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Decision deferred

The VA has not finally resolved that issue. Submit requested evidence to the open claim rather than starting a duplicate claim.

SPECIAL ROUTES

SPECIAL FILING SITUATIONS

2°

Secondary condition

A new disability allegedly caused or aggravated by an established service-connected condition. The claimed direction matters.

BDD

Still on active duty

Benefits Delivery at Discharge is a pre-separation processing track with a 180-to-90-day filing window and required SHA Part A.

1151

Disability caused by VA care

A section 1151 claim uses VA Form 21-526EZ but asks a different legal question from service connection.

TDIU

Service-connected conditions prevent work

TDIU uses additional forms and evidence about employment and functional limits. Use the dedicated TDIU guide.

TWO DIFFERENT CHOICES

CLAIM PURPOSE IS NOT THE SAME AS DEVELOPMENT PATH

CLAIM PURPOSE

Initial, increase, secondary, BDD, TDIU, and section 1151 describe what the veteran is asking the VA to decide.

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DEVELOPMENT PATH

Standard and Fully Developed describe how evidence is gathered after the claim is filed. They do not change the legal outcome standard.

DO NOT GUESS

When a condition was previously denied, the decision date and Reasons for Decision matter. Filing the wrong lane can affect both timing and the evidence the VA will consider.

