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EPISODIC CONDITIONS AND THE ONE-EXAMINATION SAFEGUARD



A symptom-free visit can be real without proving lasting improvement.

APPLIES TO Diseases subject to temporary or episodic improvement	GENERAL RULE Do not reduce on one examination	EXCEPTION All evidence clearly warrants sustained improvement
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RULE FILE

Section 3.344(a) names several examples and establishes a safeguard for stabilized ratings involving conditions subject to temporary or episodic improvement. The rule is narrower than a universal two-exam requirement.

SNAPSHOT 01 | THE CORRECT RULE

ONE EXAMINATION IS NOT THE WHOLE RECORD

Stabilized evaluation

The rating has continued at the same level for five years or more.

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Episodic condition

The disease can temporarily improve, remit, or appear quiet during one snapshot.

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Heightened safeguard

Do not reduce on one examination unless all the evidence clearly warrants sustained improvement.

SNAPSHOT 02 | READ THE LONGITUDINAL RECORD

WHAT TO COMPARE

FREQ

Episode frequency

Count attacks, flares, remissions, hospitalizations, and symptom-free intervals over a meaningful period.

DURATION

Episode duration

A short quiet interval does not necessarily establish a durable change.

TRIGGER

Activity and triggers

Ask whether the exam occurred during reduced activity, treatment, seasonal change, or recovery.

RECORD

All the evidence

Use treatment notes, lay evidence, work records, testing, and earlier examinations together.

SNAPSHOT 03 | AVOID THE FALSE ABSOLUTE

PRECISE WORDING MATTERS

Accurate: A stabilized episodic condition generally should not be reduced on one examination unless all the evidence clearly shows sustained improvement.

Too broad: VA can never reduce a rating based on one examination.

QUIET IS NOT CURED

A temporary remission, controlled setting, or good examination day can be part of the evidence without proving that material improvement will persist.

