

DOES YOUR TIMELINE SUPPORT THE CLAIM?



Put the medical events in date order before asking a clinician to explain the two links.

THE QUESTION

Did the claimed cause exist early enough to explain the weight change and what happened to the sleep apnea?

WRITE A DATE OR DATE RANGE BESIDE EVERY EVENT

BUILD ONE MEDICAL TIMELINE

1

MEDICAL STARTING POINT

SERVICE-CONNECTED CONDITION

When did the condition, symptoms, treatment, or medication actually begin?

DATE

2

THE PROPOSED MECHANISM

WHY THE WEIGHT CHANGED

When did pain, reduced activity, eating changes, medication effects, or another claimed pathway begin?

DATE

3

THE INTERMEDIATE STEP

WEIGHT GAIN OR WORSENER OBESITY

List dated weights, BMI, additional gain, or evidence that existing obesity became worse.

DATE

4

THE CLAIMED DISABILITY

SLEEP APNEA HISTORY

When did symptoms appear? When were testing, diagnosis, and treatment documented?

DATE

5

THE MEDICAL EXPLANATION

MEDICAL OPINION EXPLAINING BOTH LINKS

Does the clinician explain both links using these dates and the veteran's actual record?

DATE

THE SAME DIAGNOSES CAN PRODUCE VERY DIFFERENT RECORDS

READ THE SEQUENCE BEFORE READING THE CONCLUSION

SEQUENCE FITS THE THEORY

THE DATES MOVE FORWARD

CONDITION OR TREATMENT
begins

→

WEIGHT CHANGES
documented

→

OSA DEVELOPS
or becomes worse

The chronology gives the medical opinion a sequence it can explain.

SEQUENCE NEEDS AN EXPLANATION

THE DATES APPEAR TO RUN BACKWARD

WEIGHT OR OSA
already documented

→

CLAIMED PATHWAY
appears later

→

OPINION
does not reconcile it

This does not automatically end the claim, but the clinician must address the conflict rather than ignore it.

EARLIER OBESITY DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY END THE ANALYSIS

CHOOSE THE QUESTION THE RECORD ACTUALLY RAISES

CAUSATION

DID THE PATHWAY CAUSE THE WEIGHT CHANGE?

CONDITION OR TREATMENT

→

WEIGHT GAIN

→

OSA

The opinion should explain why the service-connected condition or its treatment caused the weight change, why that change was a substantial factor in causing OSA, and whether OSA would have occurred without it.

AGGRAVATION

DID A LATER CHANGE MAKE THINGS WORSE?

BEFORE
EARLIER WEIGHT OR OSA SEVERITY

→

AFTER
ADDITIONAL INCREASE OR WORSENING

The opinion should identify what changed later, when it changed, and whether the OSA would have been less severe without that additional change.

IMPORTANT:

Use the medical onset and treatment dates, not only the later date when the VA awarded service connection.

GIVE THE CLINICIAN THE RECORD BEHIND THE ARROWS

DATES WORTH DOCUMENTING

CONDITION AND TREATMENT

Symptoms, diagnoses, procedures, medication starts, dose changes, and treatment limitations

WEIGHT HISTORY

Dated weights, BMI measurements, clothing-size changes, nutrition notes, and activity restrictions

SLEEP APNEA HISTORY

Observed symptoms, referrals, sleep studies, diagnosis, severity, PAP treatment, and later changes

COMPETING EXPLANATIONS

Other medical conditions, medications, lifestyle changes, aging, later weight loss, and contrary opinions

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A TIMELINE DOES NOT PROVE MEDICAL CAUSATION BY ITSELF.

It reveals what the medical opinion must explain, including dates that support the theory and dates that appear to contradict it.