

VA Claims Starter Checklist

10 Steps Before You File — From a Former VA Service Representative

Jacob Hausman | Army Combat Vet | 4 Years as VA Service Representative

HOW TO USE THIS:

Work through each phase in order. Check each box as you complete it. Phase 1 takes 2 minutes and protects months of back pay — do it today.

PHASE 1 / Secure Your Effective Date (DO THIS TODAY)

- ☐ **Submit an Intent to File (ITF)**
VA.gov > File a Disability Claim > start the 526EZ form. You can exit immediately. Date is locked.
- ☐ **Note your ITF date — set a 10-month reminder**
ITF expires after 365 days. Don't lose the date.

38 CFR § 3.155(b)

PHASE 2 / Get Into the VA Health System

- ☐ **Apply for VA Health Care — Form 10-10EZ**
va.gov/health-care/apply | VA diagnoses carry more weight with VSRs than private records alone.
- ☐ **Create a VA.gov account via ID.me or Login.gov**
Required to file online, track claims, and view your records.
- ☐ **Set up MyHealtheVet — check your Problem List**
Your Problem List = your active diagnoses. This is what the VSR sees when they open your file.

PHASE 3 / Gather Your Military Records

- ☐ **Submit SF-180 — request BOTH Medical AND Personnel records**
archives.gov/veterans | Medical = the injury. Personnel = where/when it happened.
- ☐ **FOIA Request — get your VA C-File**
Everything the VA already has on you. Critical if you've filed before.
- ☐ **Check your military branch portal for electronic records**
Army: HRC | Navy/USMC: BUPERS | Air Force: myPers | Coast Guard: PSC

SF-180 / NPRC

38 CFR § 1.550

PHASE 4 / Build Your Medical Evidence

- ☐ **Get a current diagnosis (VA or private — within 6 months)**
No current diagnosis = no rating. This is non-negotiable before you file.
- ☐ **Obtain a nexus letter if needed**
Private doctor's written opinion connecting your service to your condition.
- ☐ **Collect buddy statements + write your personal statement**
Lay evidence is legally valid. Describe in-service events, current symptoms, functional impact.

38 CFR § 3.303

PHASE 5 / File Your Claim & Attend Your C&P Exam

- ☐ **File VA Form 21-526EZ with all evidence attached**
va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez | List every condition.
- ☐ **Attend your C&P exam — do NOT cancel or no-show**
Describe your WORST day, not your average day. Bring all records.
- ☐ **Request your C&P exam report (DBQ) after the appointment**
Review for factual errors. Wrong findings are grounds for a challenge.

VA Form 21-526EZ

INSIDER NOTE:

The order matters. Veterans who file ITF first and gather records before submitting receive significantly more back pay. Take it one phase at a time.

Want the full step-by-step guides on every phase above?

Visit beyondthe214.com/va-claims-roadmap | Subscribe at beyondthe214.com for weekly guides, free.

Get Free Weekly Guides →
beyondthe214.com/subscribe