

Preparing for a C&P Exam

The C&P examination is one tool used by the VA in determining whether to grant a claim for compensation or pension. At some point in this process, you will most likely sit with a medical or mental professional to discuss your illness or injury. Your objective is to present your situation as completely and accurately as possible.

The C&P examination exists primarily to determine if there is an illness or injury and if so, to what degree is it disabling. The examiner is also tasked with opining as to service connection, although it is up to the rating specialist at the Regional Office to put it all together, determine service connection and offer a final rating level.

You will have a relatively short time to present your case, so preparation is essential. This is your opportunity to present a complete picture of what you are experiencing. Keep in mind that the person you are seeing is only getting a real-time snapshot of how you are feeling at that moment. You must be ready to share how your condition looks at other times as well.

It helps to spend time in advance listing how your illness or injury affects your life. Try to think in terms of good day, bad day and average day. What does each look like? Be as specific as possible. It also helps to note how that "picture" looked before you had the disability.

There are several areas you can address. Pain, motion, limitations, emotions and use, for example. When addressing these, remember to describe them in terms of good day, bad day, and average day, and use examples whenever possible.

- Pain: The attached pain chart helps to quantify your level of pain, using a scale of one to ten. Be sure to speak to how the pain affects your life.
- Motion: If you are asked to show how high you can raise your arm, raise it only so far as you can without pain. Stop and explain that this is where it begins to hurt.
- Use and limitations: If applicable, speak to what you can and cannot do as a result of your illness or injury.

The examiner will often only ask "How high can you raise your arm?" This ignores the other two issues and sets up likelihood of an "insufficient" (inadequate) examination.

It is up to the claimant to make the most of the examination. During the brief period of exam time, the vet must accurately and clearly address all three issues, and also relate how they impact work and leisure. This then gives the examiner sufficient information to make an accurate assessment.

Start keeping a journal on each of the disabilities you are claiming. Each and every day make a note of how that disability impacted you during the day. When you go to the doctor, give him or her a copy. Keep the original for future reference. Do this and you probably will have no problem at all getting an accurate assessment and a valid rating determination.

If the exam doesn't fully explore all pertinent issues, or otherwise is inadequate and the subsequent rating is not satisfactory, the vet can file a notice of disagreement, citing insufficient exam and have the claim reviewed by a senior rating specialist. Granted, this adds time to the process, sometimes over a year, sometimes many. The trick is to get the examination right the first time and avoid all the delay, fuss and bother of an appeal.

