

Exam Day Checklist

1. Before the Exam

- **Mental Preparation:**
 - **Rehearse your personal statements for each condition:**
 - New Connections: *"My [condition] was caused by [specific service event/exposure]."*
 - Increases: *"My [condition] has gotten worse over the years."*
 - **Show active care:** Note recent appointments, providers seen, and conditions addressed
 - You may be asked if the treatment is helping your condition.
 - **You can bring a spouse or family member:** They are the best witness to your daily struggles.
 - **Print copies of 21-4138 statements in Claims folder:** The examiner may not have reviewed them.
- **If Examiner Calls Early to Discuss:**
 - *"I'm busy at the moment, can we schedule a time to discuss this."*

2. Arrival & Waiting Room

- **From the moment you park:**
 - **Assume you're being observed.** No phones or conversations with others.
- **Check-in:**
 - If asked *"How are you doing today?"* → *"Taking it day by day."* (Then stop.)

3. During the Exam

- **Ask if they read your statements:**
 - Hand the examiner your printed statements if needed.
- **Tell the doctor why you are there.**
"I'm here for [condition] caused by [service event]. It affects me by [social/professional impact]."
 - Don't wait for them to ask - state your service connection immediately.
 - Assume the examiner has no knowledge of your condition and has not read your files.
- **Answering Questions Golden Rules:**
 - **Yes/No questions:** Answer *only* "Yes" or "No."
 - **Elaboration:** *Only* describe **worst days**. Do not verbally say "on my worst day".
 - This applies to limitations in range of motion and mental questions.
 - **If asked about existing ratings:**
 - Remember to *only* describe the **worst days**—we want to avoid reductions.
 - **Integrity is key:** Stop when you feel pain—don't push past your limits, even if asked.
- **Non-Verbal Communication**
 - **Show emotions when describing your symptoms (e.g., sadness, wincing, slow movements).**
 - Voice tone, body language, and facial expressions can make a difference.
- **Dangerous Topics**
 - **Service connection only:**
 - **Do NOT mention:**
 - Childhood trauma/injuries/sports or non-military related issues.
 - Assume they are looking for reasons to deny your claims.
 - Speculative causes: *"Maybe it was from..."* (Stick to your statements.)
 - **If asked about gaps in treatment or timing of your claims:**
 - *"I am here today so I can get better for my family."*
 - *"I didn't understand this was service-related until [specific event]."*

4. After the Exam

- **Leave immediately:** No post-exam chatter. You are still in the exam.
- **For C&P Exams document immediately:** Write down questions asked and your exact responses.

Critical Reminders

1. **VA rates symptoms at their worse:** Never minimize your struggles.
2. **Details matter:** Your story, records, and demeanor must align. If the examiner doubts you, your claim fails.
3. **Expect consistency checks:** Examiners may rephrase questions to verify your answers.
4. **Stay concise, no rambling:** Unnecessary details will hurt you. Only share what you want them to know.
5. **This is your only chance:** You must effectively explain your situation to someone that doesn't know you.
6. **Read this checklist again before each exam.**