

Chapter 2

Original Claims and the 526 EZ Form

Suicide Prevention:

If you, or someone you love is struggling with feelings of helplessness or thoughts of suicide, you are not alone, and help is available.

Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988 and then Press 1

Referral list of VA resources: go to va.gov and type "Suicide Prevention" in the search bar

Introduction:

This section of the workbook fully explains items discussed in episode 2 of the Veterans Access podcast. The workbook will summarize the topics covered in each episode so that you can refer back to the information without having to re-listen to the entire episode or take notes.

We describe the use of the 21- 526EZ form (hereafter referred to as the 526EZ) during multiple episodes based each different use of the form. We also describe each section of the 526EZ and how it pertains to different circumstances.

The 526EZ form is a multi-use form. You can use it to apply for many different VA programs. The following are appropriate uses of the 526EZ.

From Page 1 of the 526EZ:

Disability Service Connection	Special Monthly Compensation
Compensation Claims Submitted Prior to Discharge	Benefits Based on a Veteran's Seriously Disabled Child
Compensation under 38 U.S.C. 1151	Increased Disability Compensation
Automobile Allowance/Adaptive Equipment Secondary Service Compensation	Individual Unemployability
Temporary Total Disability Rating	Specially Adapted Housing/Special Home Adaptation
	Presumptive Service Connection

***There are different forms for **pension benefits** or **survivor benefits** and **appeals**. Do **NOT** use the 526EZ for those types of benefit claims. Contact a VSO to help you with these types of claims due to their complexity.

From Page 1 of the 526EZ:

If you are making a claim for veterans non service-connected pension benefits, use VA Form 21P-527EZ, *Application for Pension*. If you are making a claim for survivor benefits, use VA Form 21P-534EZ, *Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits*. VA forms are available at www.va.gov/vaforms.

The instructions in this section of the workbook apply to an original claim. This means the first time you make a claim with the VA, whether you are close to separating from the service or have been discharged some time ago. In this section, we only discuss the sections of the 526EZ form that apply to that scenario and will skip sections that apply to other situations.

Throughout the workbook, you will notice that we include citations from the 526EZ form so that you can follow along more easily. We will first provide you with simple instructions and then show you an image of the part of the form we are referring to.

You should also print out a **526EZ** form from the resources page of the Veterans Access Project website (veteransaccessproject.org) or va.gov so that you can fill out a rough draft as we go along. We caution against filling the form out on the va.gov site for online submission without first doing a rough draft to ensure you have all the correct information. Once the form has been submitted, it is difficult to modify your submission.

You will also need forms **21-4142** and **21-4121a** (to submit with your 526EZ) in order to have your medical records released to VA. You can find those forms on the website or at va.gov.

From Page 2 of the 526EZ:

You must:

- Complete and sign VA Form 21-4142, *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)* and VA Form 21-4142a, *General Release for Medical Provider Information to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)*, identifying any private medical records you wish VA to request for you
- Give VA enough information about other relevant evidence so that we can request it from the person or agency that has it

If you have dependents, you also need to fill out a **21-686c** form (and may need a **21-674**), which will increase your disability compensation, once approved. You can find this form on the website or at va.gov.

From Page 2 of the 526EZ:

- **If claiming dependents**, submit a completed VA Form 21-686c, *Application Request to Add and/or Remove Dependents*. If claiming a child in school between the ages of 18 and 23; also submit a completed VA Form 21-674, *Request for Approval of School Attendance*. If claiming benefits for a seriously disabled (helpless) child, also submit all, relevant, private medical treatment records pertaining to the child's pertinent disabilities

As we mentioned on the podcast, we are teaching you how to properly fill out the forms on your own. However, we also suggest you contact a Veteran Service Officer from a non-profit Veteran Service Organization (such as through your county) to advise you, answer questions, and review your work before you submit. Submitting a claim with no errors saves a lot of time and effort later.

From Page 1 of the 526EZ:

NOTE: You may wish to contact an accredited veterans service officer (VSO) to assist you with your application. For a list of accredited veterans service organizations go to <https://www.va.gov/ogc/recognizedvsos.asp>. You may also contact your state office of veterans affairs at <https://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>, should you need further assistance with the application process.

VA Claims Process as explained on the 526EZ

*****Read this whole section before filling out the form.**

When looking at the 526EZ form, you will first notice that there are pages and pages of instructions. Do not be concerned. The VA tried to answer every question anyone could ask, but it is hard to wade through all those instructions to figure out what applies to your own situation. We break those instructions down so that you only have to digest what you need for submitting your original claim.

Parts of the Instructions to pay close attention to when making an original claim:

VA Disability Compensation is provided to veterans with a “service-connected” disability.

You need all three of these elements in order to qualify for disability compensation:

- 1) Current chronic disability (a condition lasting at least 6 months)
- 2) In-service event that caused the disability
- 3) Nexus/link between the two as determined by a medical provider

From Page 4 of the 526EZ:

To support a claim for **service connection**, the evidence must show:

- You had an injury in service, or a disease that began in or was made permanently worse during service, or there was an event in service that

caused an injury or disease; **AND**
- You have a current physical or mental disability. This may be shown by medical evidence or by lay evidence of

persistent and recurrent

symptoms of disability that are visible or observable; **AND**
- A relationship exists between your current disability and an injury, disease, symptoms, or event in service. This may be shown by medical

records or medical opinions or, in certain cases, by lay evidence.

Special Considerations which apply to VA Disability Compensation:

Presumptive Conditions:

If you were exposed, during active duty, to certain chemicals (e.g. Agent Orange, burn pits), and have a condition that is already established as linked by the VA, it becomes a presumptive condition (#3- nexus is automatic).

From Page 4 of the 526EZ:

To support a claim for presumptive service connection the evidence must show:

- You served in a recognized location that qualifies you for the presumption of exposure; **AND/OR**
- You have a current disability that qualifies you for the presumption of service connection. This may be shown by medical evidence or by lay

evidence of persistent and recurrent symptoms of disability that are visible or observable.

Under certain circumstances, VA may presume that certain current diseases were caused by service, even if there is no specific evidence proving this in your particular claim. Service connection is presumed for certain diseases for the following veterans:

- Former prisoners of war;
- Veterans who have certain chronic or tropical diseases that become evident within a specific period of time after discharge from service;
- Veterans who were exposed to ionizing radiation, mustard gas, or Lewisite while in service;
- Veterans who were exposed to certain herbicides, such as by service in/on:

- Vietnam or qualifying offshore waters, from January 9, 1962, through May 7, 1975;
- a unit determined by VA or the Department of Defense to have operated in the Korean DMZ, from September 1, 1967, through August 31, 1971;

- individuals who performed service in the Air Force or Air Force Reserve and regularly and repeatedly operated, maintained, or

served onboard C-123 aircraft known to have used to spray an herbicide agent during the Vietnam era;

- Thailand at any United States or Royal Thai base, from January 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976;
- Laos, from December 1, 1965, through September 30, 1969;
- Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province, from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969;
- Guam or American Samoa, or in the territorial waters thereof, from January 9, 1962, through July 31, 1980; ○ Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll, from January 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977.

- Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune for no less than 30 days (consecutive or nonconsecutive) between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987; or

- Veterans who served in the Gulf War:
 - On or after August 2, 1990, and served in:

← Bahrain; Iraq; the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Somalia; United Arab

Emirates; the Gulf of Aden; the Gulf of Oman; the Persian Gulf; the Arabian Sea; the Red Sea; Afghanistan; Israel; Egypt;

Turkey; Syria; or Jordan; **OR**

- On or after September 11, 2001, and served in:

← Afghanistan; Djibouti; Egypt; Jordan; Lebanon; Syria; Yemen; or Uzbekistan.

Reservists:

Any injuries claimed must have occurred while on you were on active-duty status. You will need to obtain a “line of duty determination” from the chain of command in your reserve unit to officially recognize that you were injured during training, deployment, or activation, and the injury caused your condition. Provide this document with your claim submission if you have it.

Unfortunately, illnesses are not compensable for reservists unless they have a positive LOD determination. The only exception is a heart attack or stroke when travelling to or from active duty.

From Page 4 of the 526EZ:

To support a claim for **service connection based upon a period of active duty for training**, the evidence must show:

- You were disabled during active duty for training due to disease or injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; **AND**
- You have a current physical or mental disability. This may be shown by medical evidence or by lay evidence of persistent and recurrent

symptoms of disability that are visible or observable; **AND**

- There is a relationship between your current disability and the disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active duty for training. This may be shown by medical records or medical opinions or, in certain cases, by lay evidence.

To support a claim for **service connection based upon a period of inactive duty training**, the evidence must show:

- You were disabled during inactive duty training due to an injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty or an acute myocardial infarction,

cardiac arrest, or cerebrovascular accident during inactive duty training; **AND**

- You have a current physical or mental disability. This may be shown by medical evidence or by lay evidence of persistent and recurrent

symptoms of disability that are visible or observable; **AND**

- There is a relationship between your current disability and your inactive duty training. This may be shown by medical records or medical opinions or, in certain cases, by lay evidence.

In order to file a **supplemental claim**, you must submit or identify new and relevant evidence.

Secondary service compensation:

A secondary condition is one that was caused by, or aggravated by, a service-connected condition. For example, you might have pain in your right hip (because you limp) due to a service-connected, left hip injury. You can claim both conditions simultaneously and separately on your original claim.

From Page 5 of the 526 EZ:

To support a claim for **compensation based upon an additional disability** that was caused or aggravated by a service-connected disability, the evidence must show:

- You currently have a physical or mental disability shown by medical evidence or by lay evidence of persistent and recurrent symptoms of disability that are visible or observable, in addition to your service-connected disability; **AND**
- Your service-connected disability either caused or aggravated your additional disability. This may be shown by medical records or medical opinions or, in certain cases, by lay evidence. However, VA may presume service-connection for cardiovascular disease developing in a claimant with certain service-connected amputation(s) of one or both lower extremities.

BDD: Benefits Delivery at Discharge

You can make an original claim while still on active duty, and complete any required VA exams, if you file your claim within 90-180 days before discharge. This is the best option, as your claim will move much faster. If you can't meet this time window, you can still file claim while on active duty, and by filing a claim on AD, it will suffice as an "in-service" event (#2). It is best to file a claim for all your conditions at the earliest opportunity because if claimed within a year of discharge (best while still on AD) the VA will compensate you for conditions granted service connection starting from the day after your discharge.

From Page 5 of the 526EZ:

Under the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program you can submit a disability claim 90 to 180 days prior to your anticipated separation date from active duty. Claims are accepted from active duty Servicemembers, including reservists serving on active duty in an Active Guard Reserve (AGR) role under 10 U.S.C. and full-time National Guard members serving in an AGR role under 32 U.S.C.

BDD program participants can have their VA medical examinations conducted while they are still on active duty. You are encouraged to file your claim as close to the 180 day mark as possible to ensure your examinations can be scheduled and completed prior to your discharge from active duty. The BDD program requires that Servicemembers be available to report for examinations for 45 days following submission of a disability claim. Claims and additional contentions received with less than 90 days remaining on active duty, claim types that are excluded from the BDD program, or where the Servicemember is unable to report for an examination within the BDD required time frame will be processed under the standard VA claims process, the Fully Developed Claim (FDC) program or any other qualifying program.

BDD Program Criteria for Claim(s) for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits Submitted Prior to Separation from Active Duty:

- be within 90 to 180 days of discharge;
- be available to report for examinations for 45 days following the submission of a disability claim; • submit copies of service treatment records for the current period of service with the BDD claim; • provide an anticipated release from active duty date; *and*
- complete a VA Form 21-526EZ.

Separation Health Assessment

The Separation Health Assessment form is a new form that is separate from the 526EZ, and replaces previous exit exam forms (used by DoD), and will be used by VA and DoD beginning in April 2023. It has been adopted for two reasons: 1) the form contains a more complete list of

conditions and exposures, so it can document a more accurate depiction of the service member's health as they prepare to process out of the military service. 2) it is a form that can be directly used by the VA to initiate exams for service members as part of an Initial Claim for VA Disability (called Benefits Delivery at Discharge or BDD. This reduces the time that it takes for the VA to decide your claim.

Part A of the Separation Health Assessment must be filled out by the service member. The form is simple, but must be filled out completely and carefully. Take your time, and double check your work. The left-hand column describes the information that is needed. The right-hand column is where you will document your responses.

Section I includes your demographic information as well as the current profession you have in the military. This is followed by the date of the exam and your expected date of release. If you are filing a BDD claim, in Section I, line 4, mark the "YES" box to indicate that you plan to file a claim with the VA. In Line 5, mark that this is part of a BDD claim. In line 5: mark "NO," that you have not filed a previous claim with the VA.

In Line 6 and 7, if you have had any specialty exams in the last year, list them, so that exam can serve as part of the documentation for your claim.

Section II should be filled out slowly and completely. Even though an exit exam ends with a determination of "Fit for Separation," this is very different from being "Fit for Duty". Do not minimize symptoms (as you may have in the past, so that you could be allowed to deploy). This is the time to be fully honest about the conditions you have, or have ever had, while in the military service. Do not exaggerate, but do not minimize your symptoms.

The SHA starts with your current symptoms, and asks specific questions about different health conditions you have now, or have ever had in the past, during military service. There is a section that reviews environmental exposures, such as a burn pits. The SHA form also gives you the opportunity to sign up for the Burn Pit Registry, which we recommend you do (if you were exposed), even if you do not currently have conditions associated with Burn Pit Exposure.

While preparing this episode, we realized that there are several conditions missing from the SHA form, so make sure to use the "Comments/Remarks" section at the end of the form to document conditions such as: Sleep disorders (including sleep apnea), male genitourinary conditions, allergic rhinitis, and MST.

Finally, be sure to sign and date the form! The signature line is in the middle of page 15, so make sure you don't overlook that important element. Keep a copy of this form for your own records.

The SHA will be submitted with Entrance Exam for all BDD claims. This will be the standard form for both VA and DoD moving forward.

Temporary Total Disability:

You can apply for this if you have to have surgery to treat a service-connected disability. In this situation, you may be eligible for temporary 100% for all of your lost wages during that period.

From Page 5 of the 526EZ:

In order to support a claim for a **temporary total disability rating due to hospitalization**, the evidence must show:

- You were treated for more than 21 days for a service-connected disability at a VA or other approved hospital; **OR** • You underwent hospital observation at VA expense for a service-connected disability for more than 21 days.

In order to support a claim for a temporary total disability rating due to surgical or other treatment performed by a VA or other approved hospital or outpatient facility, the evidence must show:

- The surgery or treatment was for a service-connected disability; **AND**
- The surgery required convalescence of at least one month; **OR**
- The surgery resulted in severe postoperative residuals, such as incompletely healed surgical wounds, stumps of recent amputations, therapeutic

immobilizations, house confinement, or the required use of a wheelchair or crutches; **OR** • One major joint or more was immobilized by a cast without surgery.

Effective Dates:

You must file in a timely manner to receive all the benefits you earned.

From Page 7 of the 526EZ:

If we grant your claim, the beginning date of your entitlement or increased entitlement to benefits will generally be based on the following factors:

- When we received your claim; **OR**
- When the evidence shows a level of disability that supports a certain rating under the rating schedule.

If VA received your claim prior to or within one year of your separation from the military, entitlement will be from the day following the date of your separation as long as the disability was present at that time.

ITF: Intent To File Form

You can find this form on the website or at va.gov. Submitting this form locks in the effective date as long as you file your claim within a year. Alternatively, even starting to fill the 526EZ form out electronically on va.gov will cause an electronic ITF to automatically start (you still have to submit within a year).

And now to **FILLING OUT THE FORM!!**:

Make sure to have your 526EZ form before you proceed forward:

Turn to page 9

LINE 1

*****Important!**

Select the type of claim program/process:

Recommend that you select “Fully Developed Claim” (first box that says: FDC program)

This means you are also supplying all the information needed to make a decision. The VA can access government provided healthcare records, but you will need to provide any private chart notes/evidence when you submit this form. You can always add more evidence and/or appeal later. Checking this box allows them to adjudicate as quickly as possible.

SECTION I

LINES 2-11

Fill out demographics carefully.

LINE 12

Agree. Fill out email address for much faster communication about your claim.

SECTION II

LINES 14a-14c

Skip this section.

SECTION III

LINE 15

Homeless Information: If homeless, fill this out, especially 15e and 15f so that the VA knows how to get in touch with you.

SECTION IV

LINE 16 (**Most important part of the entire form!**)

Claim information: write “See attached” and then fill out Item 16 information on a separate page. You will be providing more details than can fit in the small boxes. We will come back to this step towards the end of the podcast episode.

LINE 17

Add any medical facilities where you were treated including nonmilitary and VA providers.

Remember to get the chart notes from the private providers to submit with your claim. You will likely have to fill out a separate for each office to have your records released. If your records

with a provider are extensive, be sure to give them as much advance notice as possible because it might take them time to get the chart copied for you.

From Page 8 of the 526EZ:

Examples of evidence that you should tell us about or give to us that may affect how we assign a disability evaluation include the following:

- Information about on-going treatment records, including VA or other Federal treatment records, you have not previously told us about;
- Social Security determinations;
- Statements from employers as to job performance, lost time, or other information regarding how your condition(s) affect your ability to work;

OR

- Statements discussing your disability symptoms from people who have witnessed how the symptoms affect you.

SECTION V

LINES 18-22

Service Information: Fill out precisely. Match the information to your DD-214.

LINE 23

Only fill out this section if you were a POW.

SECTION VI

LINES 24-25

Retired pay: Only fill out if this applies to you. This may alter the disability compensation amount you receive.

LINE 26

Leave blank.

LINE 27

Enter any lump sum payments for severance/separation, if applicable.

LINE 28

SKIP THIS LINE!

SECTION VII

LINE 29

If you don't have a banking institution, get one. Checks take a LOT longer to arrive.

LINES 30-32

Enter your financial Institution information for direct deposit (see notes in line 29).

SECTION VIII

LINES 33a & b

***Sign and date.

SECTIONS IX-XI

These sections will only be filled out if you are being assisted by a VSO or by someone acting as a Power Of Attorney (POA).

NOW LET'S GO BACK TO LINE 16:

Listen to this entire section of the podcast and all the notes in this section before filling out SECTION IV!

This is where you actually say which chronic injuries/illnesses you are claiming were caused or aggravated by your active duty service. It is very important to fill this section out accurately and not guess. Some things need to be claimed in a certain way to protect you legally.

This information is not designed to “game” the system, nor exaggerate your symptoms. VA law and regulation justify all the advice we are providing. All conditions that may have originated during active duty, or were aggravated by active duty, should be claimed.

***You should avoid anyone advising that they can guarantee a certain percentage rating or tell you how to “work” the system, or encourage you to exaggerate or lie. The truth will come out and it will seriously harm your claim. The VA will deny your claim, and aggressively pursues overpayments, if fraud is discovered.

VA Disability Compensation does not pay for being exposed to chemicals, radiation, or burnpits, instead it pays for the conditions that the exposure **caused**. You have to have a chronic condition related to it (e.g. burn pits leading to asthma, a knee injury leading to chronic pain in the joint).

Item 16 columns with the specific questions you need to answer for each condition claimed.

CURRENT DISABILITY(IES)	EXAMPLES OF EXPOSURE TYPE	EXAMPLES OF HOW THE DISABILITY(IES) RELATE TO SERVICE	EXAMPLES OF DATES
<p>What is the disability?</p> <p>Use common terms unless you have a diagnosis from a medical provider.</p> <p>Trying to diagnose yourself may limit other potential diagnoses that the VA may discover later.</p> <p>For rating purposes, the VA can only use each symptom one time to determine the level of disability.</p> <p>If you are able to identify a symptom separately, do that.</p> <p>You can leave columns 2-4 blank if you don't have the information, but ALWAYS fill out column 1.</p>	<p>Complete this section if your condition was due to a certain type of exposure (e.g. burn pits, Agent Orange, radiation).</p> <p>Exposure to continuously wet conditions or cold exposure is also appropriate.</p>	<p>Describe how the disability relates to an in-service event.</p> <p>What was the in-service event or mechanism of injury?</p> <p>How did you get hurt?</p> <p>What was your job in the service?</p> <p>Add the general location of your service if it relates to the disability.</p> <p>Info that helps you explain why/how the disability occurred.</p>	<p>When the event occurred during service or when the disability began.</p> <p>A Disability must be of at least a 6-month duration to be considered for VA Disability Compensation.</p>

Specific examples of conditions and how to claim them:

Tinnitus:

If you have tinnitus and hearing loss, always claim them both simultaneously. If you have only tinnitus, claim both, so that you can be tested for hearing loss, and there is a higher chance of being service connected. It is difficult to have hearing loss service connected because the amount of hearing loss must be very severe to be rated for VA purposes.

Joint Pain:

Always claim pain in separate joints, individually. (“arm pain” is not sufficient if you have injuries to multiple joints such as your wrist, elbow, shoulder). Claim right and left sides separately if both have a problem on each side, do not combine into one item.

Arthritis:

Always claim arthritis as a separate condition from joint pain, if you have a clinical diagnosis or it has been shown on x-ray. This is an objective sign that there has been “wear-and-tear” on your body and my also show the progression of an injury or condition.

Joint Instability:

This includes symptoms such as locking, popping, catching, or “giving way” in joints. Claim this separate from joint pain and arthritis. The instability may be present in the neck, spine and extremities.

Radiating pain:

If you have pain, which radiates into your arms and legs from the neck or low back, claim that as a separate condition from the neck or low back pain. An example might be, “Neurologic condition in the upper extremity.”

Presumptive Conditions:

If you were exposed to any chemicals while in the service, refer to the recent PACT act legislation on va.gov to look for conditions which are now considered presumptive from the Vietnam and Gulf War eras. The number of covered conditions has been significantly increased so definite research this if you have had exposure.

TBI/PTSD/Headaches:

Claim all these conditions as separate conditions. The symptoms often overlap and the VA may only use each symptom once for rating purposes, but they have a mandate to deliver the highest rating that the veteran is entitled to by law.

If you are able to claim a symptom separately, do that.

For example, if you have both headaches from a TBI, and you also have other symptoms from the TBI (besides headaches), then claim the headache separately and get two ratings.

It is important to know that you may only be compensated for one mental health condition. There are more steps to prove PTSD than other mental health conditions and all mental health conditions are rated based on severity of symptoms. So, if you have depression or anxiety as part of your PTSD, you should feel compelled to make a claim for PTSD, simply claim what you are experiencing (either the depression or the anxiety). This will increase the chance that your condition will be rated quickly and with less invasive exams. If you claim PTSD, you will have to describe the event(s) that caused you to have the condition. Sometimes it can be too hard to talk about, although we encourage you to do so, so claiming another primary symptom of the PTSD can be less traumatic to discuss.

If you plan to claim PTSD, there is another form to fill out. Note that there is a separate version of the form for PTSD related to personal assault. You can find both PTSD forms in the workbook appendix on the website or at va.gov. If you have a combat medal be sure to include evidence with your claim and mention that to the evaluator.

From Page 2 of the 526EZ:

• **If claiming Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**, submit a completed VA Form 21-0781, *Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, or if claiming PTSD based on personal assault, submit a completed VA Form 21-0781a, *Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Secondary to Personal Assault*

EXAMPLE ITEM 16:

CURRENT DISABILITIES	IF DUE TO EXPOSURE, EVENT, OR INJURY, PLEASE SPECIFY (e.g., Agent Orange, radiation)	EXPLAIN HOW THE DISABILITY(IES) RELATES TO THE IN-SERVICE EVENT/EXPOSURE/INJURY	APPROXIMATE DATE DISABILITY(IES) BEGAN OR WORSENERD
Low Back Pain	Injury during basic training	Fell and hurt my back	May 2010
Radiating pain left leg to the foot		Secondary to low back condition	October 2020
Arthritis low back		Secondary to low back injury	
Chronic sinusitis	Burn pit	PACT Act	2013-2015
Headaches	Exposure to IED blasts	Headaches came on after several incidents and still persist	2013-2015
Anxiety with sleep disturbance	Exposure to IED blasts		2013-2015
TBI	Concussion after proximity to an explosion		October 5, 2014
Hearing Loss	Noise exposure due to gun fire and explosions	pistol and rifle marksmanship	August 2010
Tinnitus	Noise exposure due to gun fire and explosions	pistol and rifle marksmanship	August 2010

Filing your claim:

There are several ways to file your claim: online, fax or mail. If you file by mail, we suggest you send it in a trackable way to ensure that it arrived.

If you are mailing in your form, make a copy, especially the Item 16 information. If you file it online, make sure that you download yourself a digital copy. Having a copy of what you wrote for Item 16 will help you to be consistent when you need to fill out additional forms for the VA exam, which is the next step.

From Page 3 of the 526EZ:

WHERE TO SEND INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE

You may send your application and any evidence in support of your claim by using the following methods shown in the table below.

MAIL TO	SUBMIT ONLINE
Department of Veterans Affairs Evidence Intake Center PO Box 4444 Janesville, WI 53547-4444	VA gov: www.va.gov Direct Upload: AccessVA

After you file your claim:

After either you or your VSO submit your claim, the VA will do their initial “development” of your claim. This means they will look at your discharge records and service treatment records or other supplied information to determine if the claimed disability is reasonably caused by your service.

If you were on active duty when you submitted your claim, this development will be automatic (because they already know it happened while you were in-service).

If the VA determines your claimed condition is reasonable justified, the VA will schedule you for examinations with practitioners who specialize in each body system. The VA contracts with different companies that complete the examination work for the VA, such as QTC or LHI. You will often have a different exam with a different provider for each different claimed condition.

In the next episode, we will discuss preparing for your exams and what to expect during your exams. There will be additional questions to answer and provided to the examiner. Be sure to listen to Episode 3 of the podcast before filling out the paperwork that you will give to the examiner.

Good job! You finished making your claim, and are one step closer to receiving the benefits that you earned with your honorable service to the nation.