

THE VA COMPENSATION & PENSION PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

Compensation and Pension examinations, also known as “C&P exams,” are frequently used by the VA when deciding veterans’ disability claims. Specifically, the VA uses C&P exams to diagnose conditions, rate disabilities and determine service connection issues. Because C&P exams are often required, it is important that veterans understand what to expect when attending a C&P exam and that veterans are as prepared as possible prior to an exam.

About the Exam:

At some point in the process, you will most likely sit with a medical or mental health professional to discuss your illness or injury. A physical examination will likely be included. During the exam, your objective is to present your situation as completely and accurately as possible. 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 currently experiencing.

Compensation & Pension Exam Ratings:

The purpose of a disability evaluation is to determine the ability of the body as a whole, the psyche, a system, or an organ of the body to function under the ordinary conditions of daily life including employment. Whether the upper or lower extremities, back or abdominal wall, eyes or ears, the cardiovascular, digestive, or other system, or psyche are affected, evaluations are based upon the lack of usefulness of these parts or systems, especially in self-support.

The medical examiner therefore must furnish a full description of the effects the disability has upon the person’s ordinary activity. It may be established, for example that a person is too disabled to engage in employment although he or she is fairly comfortable at home or while engaging in limited activity.

Different examiners may not describe the same disability using the same language. It is the responsibility of the rating specialist to interpret medical examiners’ reports in the light of the whole recorded history, reconciling the various reports into a consistent picture so the rating accurately reflects the elements of disability present.

Preparing for the Exam:

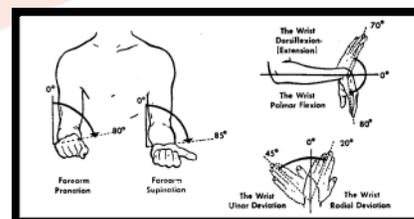
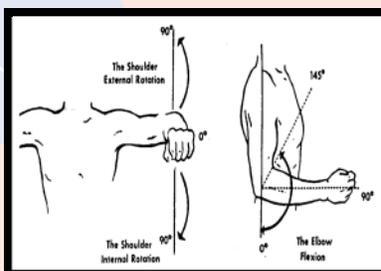
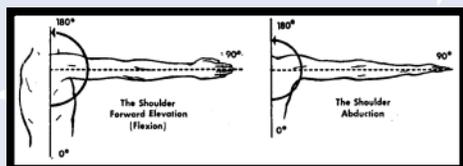
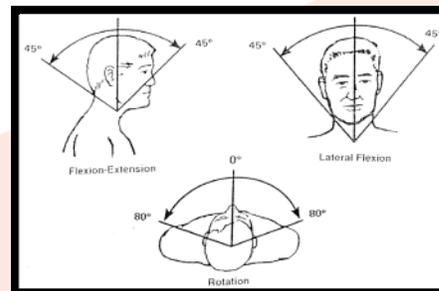
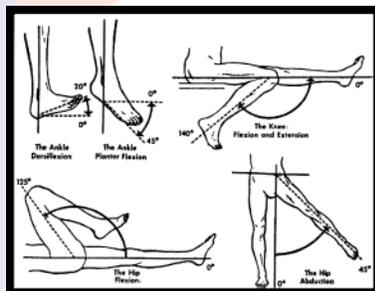
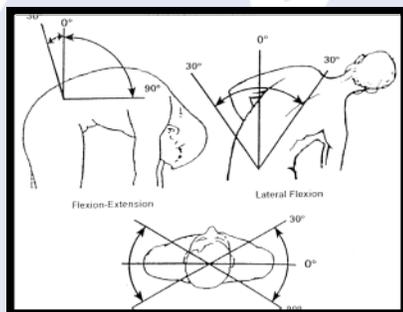
Keep in mind that the person you are seeing is only getting a real-time snapshot of how you are feeling at the moment of the exam. Be prepared to describe your illness or injury in terms of how it impacts your life at other times as well. It helps to spend time in advance listing how your illness or injury affects your life on a daily basis. Try to think in terms of a good day, bad day, and an average day. Be as specific as possible.

Exam Specifics:

Several areas may be addressed during your exam: pain, motion, limitations, emotions, use and limitations, and functional loss.

When addressing these issues remember to describe them in terms of a good, bad, and average day, and use examples whenever possible.

- **Pain** - Be sure to speak of how the pain affects your life on a daily basis and NOT the level you think your pain is at, as everyone's pain level and tolerance is different.
- **Motion** - The motion chart in this brochure will show you the range of motion (ROM) the VA uses to evaluate the loss of your major joints for Disability Compensation payments. *Note:* If you are asked to show how high you can raise your arms and/or legs, or bend your finger joints, remember to raise or bend them only as far as you can without pain. Stop and explain the point where it begins to hurt.
- **Use & Limitations** - If applicable, speak to what you can and cannot do as a result of your injuries. Be as specific as possible about your limitations (e.g., cannot pick up my child; cannot ride a bike; cannot lift, squat, or drive a car).
- **Emotions** - It helps to address the impact your current illness or injury has on your emotional well-being, (e.g., depressed, anxious, feelings of uselessness).
- **Functional Loss** - Disability of the musculoskeletal system is primarily the inability, due to damage or infection in parts of the system, to perform the normal working movements of the body with normal exertion, strength, speed, coordination, and endurance. The functional loss may be due to absence of part or all, of the necessary bones, joints and muscles, or associated structures, or to deformity, adhesions, defective innervations, or other pathology, or it may be due to pain, supported by adequate pathology and evidenced by the visible behavior of the claimant undertaking the motion. Weakness is as important as limitation of motion. A body part that becomes painful when used must be regarded as seriously disabled. The diagrams below illustrate techniques that may be used to determine the degree of functional loss.



Exam Tips:

The following is written from a Compensation & Pension examiner's perspective to assist veterans with the C&P exam process. Some of these tips are common sense, but will serve as a good guideline for all VA exams.

- Be on time or a little early. Familiarize yourself with the exam location ahead of time and allow extra time for traffic and parking.
- Be polite. Yelling at the examiner for the injustices you perceive will do nothing but alienate him/her.
- Keep in mind that your examiner is the person who is going to judge you. It's his/her job and that is why you are there.
- Don't waste your time relating how badly you believe you've been mistreated. The examiner only has a short time to figure out how impaired you are and he/she needs the facts.
- Be honest. Don't embellish your stories. Be able to document everything you tell the examiner.
- When you are asked, "How are you doing today?" remember to report how you really are doing, not how you'd like to be doing. Most veterans want to be doing much better than they really are and sometimes pride keeps them from letting anyone know how badly they really are doing.
- Ask if your spouse or partner can accompany you into the exam room. Oftentimes they will be able to describe your condition more comprehensively than you are able to.