

The Hearing Record

Why you are the worst witness to your own hearing loss, why your audiologist's report may not count, and two weeks of notes from the people who actually notice.

You cannot hear what you are missing. That is not a figure of speech. The words that fall into the gap never register as missing, so when somebody asks how your hearing is, you answer honestly and you answer wrong.

Meanwhile the ringing you can hear all night is the part you describe in detail. So the claim comes in heavy on the sound you notice and thin on the loss you do not.

WHAT IS IN HERE

1. Why your own account is the weakest evidence you have
2. What VA counts as a hearing exam, and what it does not
3. The two-week log for the people around you
4. A check before you file

This is general education. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or a promise about any claim result. Nobody can promise you an outcome. A VA-accredited representative can help you with your claim at no cost. FWD Assist HQ is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs or any government agency.

You are the wrong witness

Your spouse knows more about your hearing loss than you do.

Hearing loss does not feel like silence. It feels like people mumbling. It feels like the TV being too quiet, or a room being too noisy, or your kid not speaking up. The missing words do not leave a hole you can point at. Your brain closes the gap and moves on, and you go on believing you heard the whole sentence.

So when you sit down to write about it, you write about the ringing, because the ringing is the part you experience directly. The loss shows up as a list of other people's failures to speak clearly.

THE ONE LINE TO REMEMBER

The people who live with you have the evidence. You have the ringing.

Both belong in the file. Only one of them is going to come from you.

What that changes

Those are other people's examples. Yours will sound nothing like them, and they should not. What is worth borrowing is how small each one is: a single conversation, in one room, on one day.

What you would write	What the household actually saw
My hearing is not great in crowds	He stopped going to the Tuesday breakfast in March. Said the restaurant was too loud to follow anything.
I have to ask people to repeat themselves	I say his name from the next room and he does not turn. Not sometimes. Most of the time.
The TV is a little loud	The kids started watching upstairs because the volume downstairs hurts their ears.
My daughter says I ignore her	She taps his arm and waits for his eyes before she talks to him now. She started doing that around age six.

Read those side by side and the difference is not volume. It is that one of them names a day, a room, and a person who was there.

What VA counts as a hearing exam

This is the part that surprises people, and it is worth knowing before you spend money.

THE MISTAKE THAT COSTS MONEY

You pay for a hearing test at a private clinic or a hearing aid shop, get a printout, and send it in expecting it to settle the question. For rating purposes it usually does not, because the regulation is specific about what an exam has to contain.

The rule names the test

An examination for hearing impairment for VA purposes has to be done by a state-licensed audiologist, and it has to include two things: a controlled speech discrimination test called the Maryland CNC, and a puretone audiometry test. A hearing screening at a big box store or a quick check at a clinic will usually be missing at least one of those.

The exam is also done without your hearing aids in. That is deliberate. It is measuring what your ears do, not what your equipment does for them.

SO WHAT IS YOUR OWN RECORD GOOD FOR

Plenty, just not for setting the rating. Private records are how you show when the trouble started, that it has kept up over time, and that you were dealing with it long before you filed. That is a different job than measuring severity, and it is a job the VA exam cannot do for you.

What to do with that

- Keep your private audiology records. They show history, not severity.
- Do not skip or reschedule the VA exam because you already paid for one. The VA exam is the one built to the required format.
- Go to the VA exam without your hearing aids, and expect to be tested that way.
- Bring the household log from the next page. It covers what an audio booth cannot, which is what the loss does to your life.

DO THIS BEFORE YOU START GATHERING

Gathering all of this takes time, and the date VA receives your claim is what your back pay is measured from. So do not spend weeks collecting examples and then file. There is a way to hold the date first.

It is called an intent to file. VA Form 21-0966, Intent to File a Claim for Compensation and/or Pension, or Survivors Pension and/or DIC (May 2026 version). The regulation says that if VA receives your complete claim within one year of the intent to file, the claim is treated as filed on the day the intent to file came in. That protection goes to the first complete claim VA receives after the intent to file, so put every condition you mean to claim in that one filing. An intent to file does not apply to a supplemental claim.

Starting a disability compensation claim online at va.gov can establish this on its own, once you start and save the application. Do not assume it did. Look for VA's confirmation, or send the form separately so there is a dated record you can point to. For a pension claim, va.gov says to submit the intent to file even when you apply online.

The page for it is va.gov/find-forms/about-form-21-0966. It costs nothing, takes minutes, and an accredited representative will do it with you at no charge. Then take your year and gather properly.

For the person who lives with me

This page and the next one go together. Print both, or photograph both. Your household does not need the rest of this pack.

THIS IS FOR

WRITTEN BY

DATE

Somebody you live with is filing a claim about their hearing. They genuinely cannot tell you what they are missing, because missed words do not feel like anything. You can. For the next two weeks, jot down what you actually notice. Plain words are better than careful ones.

Write down things like this:

When you said something and got no response. When the volume was a problem for somebody else in the room. When they left somewhere early or stopped going. When they answered a question you did not ask. Put a date on each one, even a rough one.

Date	What happened

Please do not write

What you think their diagnosis is, how bad you think it is on a scale, or what rating they should get. None of that helps. Just what you saw and heard, and roughly when.

For the person who lives with me, page two

The second of the two pages. Everything above was what you saw. This is what makes it usable.

THIS IS FOR

WRITTEN BY

DATE

LAST, AND PEOPLE FORGET THIS

Sign this page, date it, and put a phone number or email on it in case VA needs to reach you. Then give it back to the person who is filing the claim. They will send it in. You do not have to submit anything yourself.

Write only what you saw or did yourself. If you are not sure about something, leave it out rather than guessing. The parts you are certain of are the parts that carry weight.

Signed

Printed name and date

Phone or email

Before you file

Two minutes.

- ☐ I described the ringing and the loss as two separate things, because they are.
- ☐ Somebody who lives with me wrote down what they observed, with dates.
- ☐ I did not rely on a private hearing test to establish severity.
- ☐ I kept my private records anyway, to show when this started.
- ☐ I have the VA exam scheduled and I am not skipping it.
- ☐ I know the exam is done without hearing aids in.
- ☐ If I served around blasts, engines, aircraft, or weapons, that is in the file in plain terms.
- ☐ I said what I stopped doing, not only what is harder to do.

ONE THING PEOPLE LEAVE OUT

Tinnitus and hearing loss are separate conditions and they are rated separately. Filing for the ringing does not automatically put the loss in front of anybody. If both are going on, both have to be raised.

The ringing, and the noise

Two halves of this claim that the exam does not measure.

The ringing itself

The ringing is its own thing and it has to be claimed by name. Recurrent tinnitus sits under its own diagnostic code, carries a single 10 percent evaluation, and the regulation says to assign only one evaluation whether you hear it in one ear, both ears, or in your head. It can be combined with a hearing loss evaluation, except where the tinnitus is what supports that other evaluation. So do not let it ride along inside a hearing loss claim and do not expect it twice.

Two things it turns on that people leave out: that it is recurrent, and when it started relative to service. Say both plainly.

The noise half of the claim

A hearing claim has two sides and the exam only measures one. The other is what you were around. Put it in plain terms: your job and what you actually did, what equipment or weapons or aircraft or engines were running, whether hearing protection was available and whether it was practical to wear, and when the ringing or the trouble hearing started. A line that says you were a crew chief on a flight line for four years does more work than an adjective.

ABOUT THE EXAM APPOINTMENT

The exam is scheduled by VA or its contractor and they call you, so there is nothing to arrange until you have filed. Do not skip the call.

If you cannot make it, call and reschedule rather than missing it. Missing one without good cause is worse than most people think: on an original compensation claim it means the claim is rated on whatever is already in the file, and on a claim for increase or a supplemental claim for something previously denied, the regulation says the claim shall be denied. And examiners often will not take papers from you, which is why the block below matters more than handing anything over in the room.

HOW THIS REACHES VA

Handing a page to somebody in an appointment is not the same as putting it in your file. To be sure what they wrote down lands, submit it yourself.

VA Form 21-10210, Lay/Witness Statement (July 2024 version), is the form built for a written statement from you or from somebody else. You can upload it through your account at va.gov or mail it. Form numbers and versions change, so check the current one first. The page for this form is va.gov/find-forms/about-form-21-10210 and every VA form has one at the same address with its own number on the end.

The person who wrote it should sign it, date it, and put a phone number or email on it, then give it back to you.

Keep a copy of what you sent and how you sent it.

NOBODY SHOULD CHARGE YOU TO FILE

Help from an accredited Veterans Service Officer is free. Always. Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and your state or county veterans service office all have accredited representatives and none of them charges you. The search is at va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/find-rep.

Nobody may charge you a fee for helping with your claim before VA issues its first decision on it. That rule is 38 USC 5904(c)(1). After the first decision an accredited agent or attorney may charge, and 38 CFR 14.636 sets the limits, measured against past-due benefits, which means the back pay owed for the stretch before the decision: a fee not over 20 percent of that is presumed reasonable if that person represented you through the date of the decision, and a fee over one third is presumed unreasonable. Only an accredited agent or attorney may charge you anything.

So if somebody who is not accredited offers to file for you, wants money up front, or wants a cut, walk away and report them to the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

Where this is written down

The requirement that a hearing exam be done by a state-licensed audiologist and include both a Maryland CNC controlled speech discrimination test and puretone audiometry, and that it be done without hearing aids, is in 38 CFR 4.85. Unusual hearing patterns are handled separately under 38 CFR 4.86.

Recurrent tinnitus is diagnostic code 6260 in 38 CFR 4.87, which carries a single 10 percent evaluation whether the sound is perceived in one ear, both ears, or in the head, and which may be combined with an evaluation under certain other codes including hearing loss, except where the tinnitus is what supports that other evaluation.

Regulation text: [ecfr.gov](https://eCFR.gov), Title 38, Part 4, sections 4.85, 4.86 and 4.87.

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Current as of October 2026. Regulations change. Check for a newer version before you rely on this.

If working on this is bringing things up, the Veterans Crisis Line is 988 then press 1, or text 838255. Family members can call it too.