



VA Rating Reductions

What a proposed reduction means, the 30-day and 60-day deadlines, what VA must prove, and how to protect your rating

A letter proposing to reduce your rating is frightening, but it isn't a decision. Your payments keep coming while it's pending, and VA carries the burden of proving your condition actually improved. Two deadlines decide how much protection you get. Every underlined item below is a live link to the official source.

If you just got a proposed reduction letter, do these two things

1. **Request a predetermination hearing within 30 days** of the date on the notice. A timely request keeps your payments at the current level while VA decides ([38 CFR § 3.105\(i\)](#)).
2. **Send evidence within 60 days** showing your condition hasn't improved ([§ 3.105\(e\)](#)).

You can do both. Get free help from an [accredited representative](#) today, not next month.

Key contacts

Who	Contact	What for
VA benefits hotline	800-827-1000 (TTY: 711)	How to submit your hearing request and evidence; ask about your file
Free help	Find an accredited representative	No cost; they can request the hearing and represent you at it
Claim or appeal status	va.gov claim status	Confirm VA received your response
Your claims file and the exam report	VA Form 20-10206	Freedom of Information Act or Privacy Act request
Veterans Crisis Line	Dial 988, press 1 or text 838255	24/7 support

1. What a proposed reduction is

- **It's a proposal, not a decision.** When VA believes a lower evaluation is warranted and it would reduce your payments, VA must first issue a rating **proposing** the reduction, with all material facts and reasons ([38 CFR § 3.105\(e\)](#)).
- **Your money doesn't change yet.** Payments continue at the current rate during the proposal period.
- **VA must tell you why**, in detail, and must tell you about your right to a predetermination hearing.
- **If VA finalizes it**, the reduction takes effect the **last day of the month following 60 days** from the date of the proposal notice, so you generally have about three months before your payment changes.
- **Due process isn't optional.** If VA skips these steps, a reduction can be challenged on procedural grounds ([38 CFR § 3.103](#)).

2. What triggers a review

Trigger	What's happening
A routine future examination	VA scheduled a re-exam when it granted the rating, usually because the condition was expected to change (§ 3.327)



Trigger	What's happening
You filed a new claim	Filing for an increase or a new condition puts your file in front of a rater who reviews the evidence, which can cut both ways
New medical evidence	Treatment records, a hospital summary, or an exam report suggesting improvement
You missed a scheduled exam	Failing to report without good cause can reduce or discontinue a running award (§ 3.655)
A temporary rating ending	Convalescent or hospitalization ratings are time-limited by design; when they end, that isn't a reduction of your underlying rating
Clear and unmistakable error	VA can correct a decision containing a clear and unmistakable error, with the same notice rights (§ 3.105(a))

Good cause for missing an exam includes illness, hospitalization, or a death in the family. If you missed one, contact VA immediately, explain why, and ask to reschedule.

3. The deadlines, and what they protect

Deadline	What it does	Rule
30 days from the notice date	Request a predetermination hearing . A timely request means payments continue at the previously established level until VA makes a final decision	§ 3.105(i)
60 days from the notice date	Submit additional evidence showing payments should continue at the present level	§ 3.105(e)
Effective date if VA finalizes	The last day of the month following 60 days from the date of the proposal notice	§ 3.105(e)
1 year from a final reduction	Request a Supplemental Claim, Higher-Level Review, or Board Appeal	VA decision reviews

Count from the date on the letter, not the day you opened it

The clock runs from the **date of the notice**. Mail delays eat into your time, so act the day it arrives. If the letter reached you late, say so in writing and keep the envelope.



4. Step by step: how to respond

Week 1

1. **Read the whole letter** and write down the conditions involved, the current and proposed percentages, the evidence VA relied on, the notice date, and both deadlines.
2. **Request the predetermination hearing in writing:** "I request a predetermination hearing under 38 CFR § 3.105(i)." Send it to arrive within 30 days and keep proof.
3. **Get a free accredited representative**, who can request the hearing, gather evidence, and appear with you.
4. **Request the exam report and your file** ([VA Form 20-10206](#)). You can't rebut an exam you haven't read.

Weeks 2 to 6

1. **See your doctors** and get current records documenting symptoms, flare-ups, medications, and limits.
2. **Ask for a provider statement** answering VA's test directly: has the condition actually improved, and has your ability to function **under the ordinary conditions of life and work** improved? A [Disability Benefits Questionnaire](#) helps.
3. **Point out problems with VA's exam:** shorter or less thorough than the exam your rating was based on, missing testing or records, no discussion of flare-ups.
4. **Gather lay statements** from family, coworkers, or friends describing your bad days ([VA Form 21-10210](#)).
5. **Write your own statement** ([VA Form 21-4138](#)): symptoms now versus when you were rated, missed work, treatment changes, what you've stopped doing.

By day 60

1. **Submit everything in writing**, name and file number on every page, and keep a complete copy.
2. **Send the response form** that came with the letter, noting your hearing request on it.
3. **Confirm receipt** online or by calling 800-827-1000.

5. What VA must prove

In a reduction case **the burden is on VA**, not you. Before reducing, VA must review the entire record, not just the newest exam.

- **A full and complete examination.** Examinations less full and complete than those the rating was based on can't be used as the basis of a reduction ([§ 3.344\(a\)](#)).
- **Actual improvement, not a good day.** Ratings subject to temporary or episodic improvement won't be reduced on a single examination unless clearly warranted by all the evidence.
- **Improvement that will last.** Any material improvement must be reasonably certain to continue **under the ordinary conditions of life**.
- **For total (100%) ratings:** no reduction without an examination showing **material improvement**, and VA must consider whether you improved while working or actively seeking work rather than through prolonged rest or a regimen that prevents work ([§ 3.343\(a\)](#)).
- **For TDIU:** VA can't reduce it solely because you took a job unless you hold that substantially gainful work 12 consecutive months, and it needs clear and convincing evidence of actual employability ([§ 3.343\(c\)](#)).
- **The two-part test:** courts have summarized it as requiring VA to show both that the condition improved **and** that your ability to function under the ordinary conditions of life and work improved. Arguing VA failed to make both findings is often the strongest point in these cases.



6. Protected ratings: 5, 10, and 20 years

How long you've held it	Protection	Rule
Under 5 years	Least protection, but VA must still show improvement and follow the notice and hearing rules. A rating can't be cut without evidence	§ 3.344(c)
5 years or more at the same level ("stabilized")	VA must show sustained material improvement based on all the evidence, not one exam, reasonably certain to continue under the ordinary conditions of life	§ 3.344(a), (b)
10 years or more of service connection	Service connection can't be severed except for fraud or a discharge-related bar. VA can still reduce the percentage, but not take the connection away	§ 3.957
20 years or more at or above a level	A rating continuously in effect 20 years can't be reduced below that level except on a showing of fraud. The strongest protection	§ 3.951(b)
P&T, static, or minimum ratings	VA generally doesn't schedule routine future exams where the disability is static, has persisted without material improvement for 5 years or more, is permanent with no likelihood of improvement, is at the minimum rating, or where a lower rating wouldn't change the combined rating. Veterans over 55 generally aren't scheduled either, except in unusual circumstances	§ 3.327(b)

Do the math on your own dates. The period runs from the **effective date** of the rating to the effective date of the proposed reduction. If you're close to 5, 10, or 20 years, say so in writing, with the dates.

7. Evidence that works

Evidence	What it should show
Current treatment records	Ongoing symptoms, flare-ups, medication changes, injections, therapy, ER or urgent care visits, specialist referrals
A treating provider's letter	That the condition has not materially improved, that any improvement isn't sustained, and how it limits you at work and in daily life, addressing the same rating criteria VA used
Work evidence	Missed days, accommodations, written warnings, reduced schedule, job change, supervisor's statement
Medication list	Doses and side effects, showing the condition is controlled only with ongoing treatment, not resolved
Lay statements	Specific, dated examples from people who see your bad days
Your statement	A plain comparison of then and now, plus what you can no longer do
Problems with VA's exam	Shorter than the original, missing testing, examiner didn't review the file, no discussion of flare-ups, a single snapshot on a good day

One sentence to aim for: a provider writing that your condition "has not improved under the ordinary conditions of life and work" goes straight at what VA must prove.

8. The predetermination hearing

- **It's your right**, and it's free. Ask within 30 days of the notice.
- **Your payments continue** at the current level while it's pending.



- **Who runs it:** a VA employee who didn't take part in preparing the proposal and who will have decision-making responsibility ([§ 3.105\(i\)](#)).
- **What happens:** you and your representative explain why the rating should stay, present evidence, and answer questions. You can bring witnesses.
- **Put everything in writing too.** Testimony helps, but the file is what gets reviewed later.
- **You can keep submitting evidence** up to the 60-day mark and while the case is open.

9. If VA reduces you anyway

- **Read the decision** for the exact findings: did VA say what improved, and did it address functioning under the ordinary conditions of life and work?
- **You have 1 year** to request a Supplemental Claim (new evidence), a Higher-Level Review (VA error), or a Board Appeal ([VA decision reviews](#)).
- **Argue the procedure, not just the medicine.** Missing notice, no hearing offer, a less-thorough exam, or no finding of sustained improvement can undo a reduction.
- **Watch for an overpayment.** A retroactive reduction can create a debt: **30 days** to dispute, **1 year** to request a waiver. See our guide to VA withholding, recoupment, and debt.
- **You can file for an increase again** any time your condition worsens. A reduction isn't permanent either.
- **Clear and unmistakable error** is a separate path to revise an old decision ([§ 3.105\(a\)](#)).

10. Things people don't think of

- **Missing a C&P exam can cost you everything.** Failing to report without good cause can reduce or stop a running award, with no improvement shown at all.
- **Filing for an increase can open a review** of what you already have. Not a reason to avoid filing, just a reason to be prepared and document your worst days.
- **Working doesn't reduce a schedular rating** for most conditions, because the criteria are based on symptoms. The exceptions are TDIU and ratings whose criteria describe your ability to work, like total occupational impairment for mental health.
- **"Permanent and total" isn't absolute.** It means VA doesn't expect improvement and generally won't schedule routine exams, not that a rating can never be reviewed.
- **A hearing request is the only thing that freezes your payment,** and it has the shorter deadline. Send it first, then build evidence.
- **Ask for the exam report.** Many reductions rest on a brief exam that contradicts the treatment records.
- **Reducing one condition may not change your combined rating.** Do the math before you panic, and note VA generally shouldn't schedule an exam where a lower rating wouldn't change the combined rating.
- **Over 55?** Routine future exams generally aren't scheduled, except in unusual circumstances.
- **Keep your address current with VA.** Notice goes to your latest address of record, and a letter you never see still starts the clock.
- **A temporary 100% ending isn't a reduction.** Surgery and hospitalization ratings are time-limited from the start.
- **Other benefits can shift** when a combined rating drops, including health care priority group and some state benefits.
- **Don't stop treatment to look "sick enough."** Consistent treatment documents ongoing severity; gaps in care are what VA cites as improvement.

11. Protecting your rating long term

- **Keep consistent treatment** for your service-connected conditions.



-
- **Prepare for every exam.** Describe your worst days and flare-ups honestly, not just how you feel that morning.
 - **Keep a symptom log,** including flare-ups, missed work, and days you couldn't do normal activities.
 - **Read every piece of VA mail** the day it arrives and respond to anything with a deadline.
 - **Go to scheduled exams,** or reschedule in writing before the date.
 - **Know your dates.** Track the effective date of each rating so you know when the 5, 10, and 20-year protections apply.
 - **Ask about permanence.** If your condition truly won't improve, ask VA to consider a static or permanent and total finding, and check your benefit letter ([download VA letters](#)).

Reduction response checklist

First 30 days

- ☐ Wrote down the notice date, the conditions involved, and both deadlines
- ☐ Requested a predetermination hearing in writing (within 30 days) and kept proof of mailing
- ☐ Contacted a free accredited representative
- ☐ Requested a copy of the exam VA relied on and my claims file (VA Form 20-10206)
- ☐ Checked how long the rating has been in effect (5, 10, or 20 years)

Evidence, by day 60

- ☐ Got current treatment records for the condition
- ☐ Got a provider letter saying the condition hasn't improved under ordinary conditions of life and work
- ☐ Identified problems with VA's exam (less thorough, missing tests, file not reviewed)
- ☐ Collected lay statements (VA Form 21-10210)
- ☐ Wrote my own statement comparing then and now (VA Form 21-4138)
- ☐ Gathered work evidence: missed days, accommodations, schedule changes
- ☐ Listed medications, doses, and side effects
- ☐ Submitted everything in writing with my file number, and kept copies
- ☐ Confirmed VA received it

If VA finalizes the reduction

- ☐ Read the decision for the findings VA made, and what it left out
- ☐ Chose a decision review within 1 year
- ☐ Raised procedural errors as well as medical evidence
- ☐ Watched for a debt letter, and disputed within 30 days if needed
- ☐ Planned when to file for an increase if my condition worsens

My reduction worksheet

Fill this in from your letter so every form and call uses the same facts.

Date on the proposal notice

My 30-day hearing deadline

My 60-day evidence deadline

Condition(s) proposed for reduction

Current rating / proposed rating

Combined rating now / after

Effective date of the rating being reduced

Years held at this level (5 / 10 / 20?)

Evidence VA cited

Date I requested the hearing

Date I sent evidence

Representative and phone

VA file number

Symptom and flare-up log

Bring this to your exam and send a copy with your evidence.

Date	Symptoms / flare-up	What I couldn't do	Work missed / treatment

Date	Symptoms / flare-up	What I couldn't do	Work missed / treatment



Official sources

What	Where to find it
Proposed reductions, 60-day evidence, effective date: 38 CFR § 3.105(e)	law.cornell.edu, 3.105
Predetermination hearings: 38 CFR § 3.105(i)	law.cornell.edu, 3.105
Due process and hearings: 38 CFR § 3.103	law.cornell.edu, 3.103
Stabilization of evaluations (the 5-year rule): 38 CFR § 3.344	law.cornell.edu, 3.344
Continuance of total ratings and TDIU: 38 CFR § 3.343	law.cornell.edu, 3.343
20-year protection: 38 CFR § 3.951(b)	law.cornell.edu, 3.951
Service connection protected after 10 years: 38 CFR § 3.957	law.cornell.edu, 3.957
Reexaminations and when they aren't scheduled: 38 CFR § 3.327	law.cornell.edu, 3.327
Failure to report for an exam: 38 CFR § 3.655	law.cornell.edu, 3.655
Rating schedule (the criteria VA applies): 38 CFR part 4	ecfr.gov, part 4
Disability Benefits Questionnaires	benefits.va.gov
Request your claims file (FOIA or Privacy Act)	VA Form 20-10206
Statements: VA Forms 21-4138 and 21-10210	21-4138 21-10210
Decision reviews and appeals	va.gov/decision-reviews
Download your VA letters	va.gov
Find a free accredited representative	va.gov
VA benefits hotline	800-827-1000 (TTY: 711)

Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988 then press 1 · Text 838255

A reduction letter is stressful. If it's weighing on you, reach out. Free, confidential, 24/7.

This guide provides general educational information about VA disability rating reductions. It isn't legal or medical advice, doesn't guarantee any outcome, and isn't affiliated with or endorsed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans Claims Education does not prepare, present, or prosecute claims for VA benefits. Count all deadlines from the date on your own notice, and confirm current rules on VA.gov and in the Code of Federal Regulations. Information checked September 2026.

© 2026 Veterans Claims Education. All rights reserved.

