

How does the VA Compute Your Disability Percentage?

When a veteran applies for disability, the VA takes many factors into assigning a percentage to the disability. The VA has established the M21-1 Adjudication Manual for its procedures. The manual includes a section on the claimants rights and responsibilities, all processes used to review claims, assign disability, as well as survivor benefits.

The process for rating a claim is found under M21-1, Part 5. This section is divided into fourteen separate sections dependent upon the condition or disorder being claimed. Each section is then further broken down to various conditions. You can also view the applicable Code of Federal Regulations, and applicable court rulings that have set a precedence.

Once the percent rating is established, the VA uses a “whole person” approach to determining your overall disability rating. The VA assigns percentage based up increments of 10%, and rounded to the nearest 10%. If a percent is less than 5% it is rounded down. Any that are 5% or above are rounded up. Keep in mind that if a condition is bilateral, an additional 10% is added.

So if a person has more than a single service connected disability, the VA will compute the percentage starting with the most severe (highest percentage) and work down.

Here’s a simple step-by-step:

1. Start with the largest rating (e.g., back injury at 30%). Subtract it from 100%.

$$100\% - 30\% = 70\% \text{ remaining.}$$

2. Subtract the next rating (e.g., knee injury at 20%) from what’s left.

$$20\% \text{ of } 70\% = 14\%$$

$$70\% - 14\% = 56\% \text{ remaining.}$$

3. Subtract the last rating (e.g., tinnitus at 10%) from the new total.

$$10\% \text{ of } 56\% = 5.6\%$$

$$56\% - 5.6\% = 50.4\%.$$

4. Round to the nearest 10 for the combined rating.

$$50.4\% \text{ rounds to } 50\%.$$

Included are links to both the M21-1 Adjudication Manual, as well as a calculator and combined rating tables from the VA.

1. Manual for Adjudication of Disability Claims – https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001018/topic/554400000004049/M21-1-Adjudication-Procedures-Manual
2. Disability Ratings Calculator - <https://www.va.gov/disability/about-disability-ratings/>