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INFORMATION PAPER

MCJA-OSC
26 November 2014

SUBJECT: Back Pain and the Evaluation and Rating of Injuries/Conditions of the spine in the Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board (MEB/PEB) Process

1. Purpose: To provide information regarding the Army Physical Disability Evaluation System process as it relates to injuries and/or conditions of the spine.
2. Facts: Back pain is a very common condition among Soldiers. Back pain can be caused by several physical conditions, including vertebral fracture or dislocation, strain, degenerative arthritis and spinal stenosis. It is important to identify back injuries and/or conditions in the early stages of the MEB/PEB process to make sure that you receive the proper diagnosis and appropriate Veterans Administration percentage rating.
3. Determination of Disability: To be properly diagnosed and evaluated for a back injury and/or condition, you must provide radiographic evidence, a completed Range of Motion (ROM) examination, and a general physical examination.

a. Radiographic Evidence (includes, but not limited to): MRIs and x-rays provide evidence of degenerative disc disease, bulging discs, ruptured discs, and compressed vertebra.

b. Range of Motion Exams: ROM exams can be performed by doctors, physical therapists, and chiropractors. The ROM exams provide evidence of limited motion in the back which may be caused by pain, and/or mechanical block. These limitations must be measured using a goniometer and the measurements must be documented in your medical records. If your condition has changed significantly since the ROM test used in your MEB packet, you may want to advise your doctor in order to obtain a new ROM examination. The VA will evaluate your back condition using all of the evidence, however, the ROM exam generally determines what rating your back injury and/or condition will be assigned in accordance with the VASRD codes (see table below).

The SPINE - General Rating Formula for Diseases and Injuries of the Spine (For diagnostic codes 5235 to 5243 unless 5243 is evaluated under the Formula for Rating Intervertebral Disc Syndrome Based on Incapacitating Episodes). With or without symptoms such as pain (whether or not it radiates), stiffness, or aching in the area of the spine affected by residuals of injury or disease -	Rating
Unfavorable ankylosis of the entire spine	100%
Unfavorable ankylosis of the entire thoracolumbar spine	50%
Unfavorable ankylosis of the entire cervical spine; or, forward flexion of the thoracolumbar spine 30 degrees or less; or, favorable ankylosis of the entire thoracolumbar spine	40%

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Forward flexion of the cervical spine 15 degrees or less; or, favorable ankylosis of the entire cervical spine	30%
Forward flexion of the thoracolumbar spine greater than 30 degrees but not greater than 60 degrees; or, forward flexion of the cervical spine greater than 15 degrees but not greater than 30 degrees; or, the combined range of motion of the thoracolumbar spine not greater than 120 degrees; or, the combined range of motion of the cervical spine not greater than 170 degrees; or, muscle spasm or guarding severe enough to result in an abnormal gait or abnormal spinal contour such as scoliosis, reversed lordosis, or abnormal kyphosis	20%
Forward flexion of the thoracolumbar spine greater than 60 degrees but not greater than 85 degrees; or, forward flexion of the cervical spine greater than 30 degrees but not greater than 40 degrees; or, combined range of motion of the thoracolumbar spine greater than 120 degrees but not greater than 235 degrees; or, combined range of motion of the cervical spine greater than 170 degrees but not greater than 335 degrees; or, muscle spasm, guarding, or localized tenderness not resulting in abnormal gait or abnormal spinal contour; or, vertebral body fracture with loss of 50 percent or more of the height	10%

4. PEB Determination: The PEB evaluates the Soldier's condition and determines whether the Soldier is fit or unfit for continued military service. More specifically, whether one or more medical conditions may, individually or collectively, prevent the Soldier from:

- a. Performing primary military occupational specialty (PMOS) duties at the current rank, skill level and duty position as required (See DA PAM 611-21);
- b. Performing basic Soldier skills (such as carrying and firing a weapon, carrying a rucksack, etc.); and
- c. Passing an Army Physical Fitness Test.

5. This Information Paper is provided as a service to Soldiers in the MEB/PEB process and is intended as general information only. A Soldiers' Counsel is available to provide specific legal advice to Soldiers involved in the MEB/PEB process. Contact your local Office of Soldiers' Counsel for more information. If you don't know how to reach your local OSC office please contact you PEBLO or see our website for contact information at <https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/otjagosc>.

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