

Slide 1



Hearing Loss and Tinnitus

Compensation Service
July 2025

LESSON TIME	
Two Hours (120)	
STUDENT CATALOG LAYOUT	
Prework	N/A
Core Content	Self-Paced Module (90) Level Two Assessment (30)
Resources	Slide Notes
SKILLS	
TBD Level One	One Credit

OBJECTIVES

- Upon completion of this lesson, the employee should be able to:
- Identify the types of hearing loss and tinnitus.
 - Determine hearing loss criteria for VA purposes.
 - Identify evidence to review for hearing loss and tinnitus.
 - Identify hearing loss and tinnitus examination and medical opinion criteria.

REFERENCES

[38 CFR 3.159 — Department of Veterans Affairs Assistance in Developing Claims](#)
[38 CFR 3.309 — Disease Subject to Presumptive Service Connection](#)
[38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#)
[M21-1 II.iii.1.A.2.f. — Considering Unclaimed Theories of SC](#)
[M21-1 V.iii.2.B. — Conditions of the Auditory System](#)
[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. — Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)
[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.d. — Requesting Audiometric Examinations and Medical Opinions](#)
[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.3.d. — Applying Liberalizing Provisions for Tinnitus](#)
[Duty Military Occupational Specialty \(MOS\) Noise Exposure Listing](#)
[Medical Electronic Performance Support System \(Medical EPSS\)](#)
[PACT Act - Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS

Click anywhere or press Enter to move to the next slide.

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Topic One

Hearing Impairment and Tinnitus

Slide 3

Regulatory Definition Of Hearing Loss

Per [38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#), impaired hearing is considered a disability for VA purposes when:

- the auditory threshold in any of the frequencies 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, or 4000 Hertz (Hz) is 40 decibels or greater
- the auditory thresholds for at least three of the frequencies 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, or 4000 Hz are 26 decibels or greater, or
- speech recognition scores using the Maryland Consonant-Vowel Nucleus-Consonant (CNC) Test are less than 94 percent.

REFERENCES

[38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#)

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Types of Hearing Loss

For Compensation and Pension (C&P) purposes, there are four types of hearing loss:

- Conductive hearing loss – is due to a mechanical problem in the outer or middle ear
- Sensorineural hearing loss - is due to a problem in the inner ear or in the auditor (Cranial Nerve VIII) nerve between the inner ear and the brain



Reference: Medical Electronic Performance Support System (MEPSS)

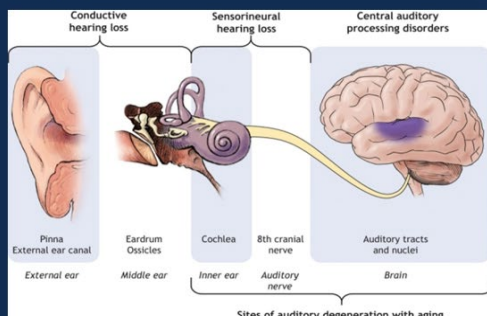
REFERENCES

[Medical Electronic Performance Support System \(Medical EPSS\)](#)

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Types of Hearing Loss (Cont.)

- Mixed hearing loss - means both conductive and sensorineural forms of hearing loss are present
- Central hearing loss - is sometimes called central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) is a rare condition that results from disease or injury of the brain.



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Hearing Loss in Service

The example below shows hearing loss in service.

Remember: when reviewing audio tests, do not consider frequencies at 250, 6000 or 8000 Hertz.

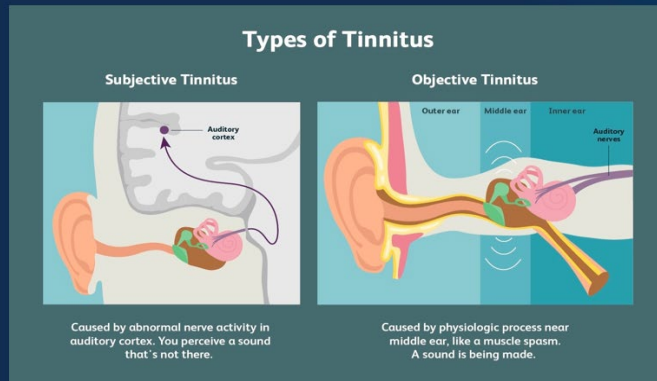
ENTRANCE EXAMINATION								
AUDIOMETER								
	250	500	1000	2000	3000	4000	6000	8000
	256	512	1024	2048	2896	4096	6144	8198
RIGHT	na	10	10	10	10	20	20	na
LEFT	na	10	10	20	20	20	15	na

DISCHARGE EXAMINATION								
AUDIOMETER								
	250	500	1000	2000	3000	4000	6000	8000
	256	512	1024	2048	2896	4096	6144	8198
RIGHT	na	15	15	30	30	45	45	na
LEFT	na	10	15	35	35	35	50	na

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Definition of Tinnitus

Tinnitus is the subjective or objective perception of a ringing or tingling sound in one or both ears without an external stimulus.



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Characteristics of Tinnitus

- Tinnitus may sound like ringing, blowing, roaring, buzzing, hissing, humming, whistling, or sizzling.
- It can be either constant or intermittent.
- Both constant and intermittent tinnitus are recurrent, which is the requirement under diagnostic code (DC) 6260 for assigning a 10-percent evaluation.

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.3.d. — Applying Liberalizing Provisions for Tinnitus](#)

REFERENCES

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.3.d. — Applying Liberalizing Provisions for Tinnitus](#)

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Causes and Onset of Tinnitus

The etiology of tinnitus often cannot be identified, because there are so many potential causes that it is impossible to select one. The causes could be due to:

- Acute noise exposure and noise-induced hearing loss
- Sensorineural hearing loss, such as from presbycusis or acoustic trauma, is the most common cause of tinnitus
- The onset may be gradual or sudden, and individuals are often unable to identify when tinnitus began

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Knowledge Check

Per [38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#), impaired hearing is considered a disability for VA purposes when speech recognition scores using the Maryland CNC Test are less than ____ percent.

98

96

94

93

REFERENCES

[38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#)

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS

Clicking anywhere on the screen or selecting any option will bring the learner to slide 11.

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Knowledge Check Answer

Per [38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#), impaired hearing is considered a disability for VA purposes when speech recognition scores using the Maryland CNC Test are less than ___ percent.

Answer:

Per [38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#), for the purposes of applying the laws administered by VA, impaired hearing will be considered to be a disability when the auditory threshold in any of the frequencies 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000 Hertz is 40 decibels or greater; or when the auditory thresholds for at least three of the frequencies 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, or 4000 Hertz are 26 decibels or greater; or when speech recognition scores using the Maryland CNC Test are less than 94 percent.

SLIDE NOTES

The answer is 94 percent. Per [38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#), for the purposes of applying the laws administered by VA, impaired hearing will be considered to be a disability when the auditory threshold in any of the frequencies 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000 Hertz is 40 decibels or greater; or when the auditory thresholds for at least three of the frequencies 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, or 4000 Hertz are 26 decibels or greater; or when speech recognition scores using the Maryland CNC Test are less than 94 percent.

REFERENCES

[38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#)

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Topic Two

Claim Review

Slide 13

Reviewing Claims for Hearing Loss and/or Tinnitus

Review each claim for direct service connection (SC) for hearing loss and/or tinnitus for:

- sufficient evidence of a current audiological disability, or lay evidence of difficulty hearing, and
- evidence documenting hearing loss and/or tinnitus in service, or an in-service event, injury, disease, or symptoms potentially related to an audiological disability.

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Reviewing Claims for Hearing Loss and/or Tinnitus (Cont.)

Important:

- A claim for hearing loss is acceptable lay evidence that the claimant is stating that he/she experiences difficulty hearing.
- A claim for tinnitus is acceptable lay evidence that the claimant is stating that he/she experiences symptoms associated with tinnitus, such as ringing in the ears.
- Sensorineural hearing loss and tinnitus are considered organic diseases of the nervous system and are subject to presumptive SC under [38 CFR 3.309\(a\) — Chronic Diseases](#).

REFERENCES

[38 CFR 3.309\(a\) — Chronic Diseases](#)

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MOS Noise Exposure

The Duty Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Noise Exposure Listing, which has been reviewed and endorsed by each branch of service, is available at:

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. —Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)

When the duty position is shown to have a high, moderate, or low probability of hazardous noise exposure:

- concede exposure to hazardous noise for the purposes of establishing an event in service.

REFERENCES

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. —Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)

[Duty Military Occupational Specialty \(MOS\) Noise Exposure Listing](#)

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MOS Noise Exposure (Cont.)

Veteran's records for evidence that the Veteran engaged in combat with the enemy in active service during a period of war, campaign, or expedition.

If the evidence establishes that the Veteran was engaged in combat:

- concede exposure to hazardous noise for the purposes of establishing an event in service.

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Knowledge Check

Use the “Duty MOS Noise” job aid to determine the answer to this question.

Which of the following Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) has a high probability of long-term noise exposure in service?

Motor Transport

Special Purpose Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance

Gas Turbine System Technician

Computer Analyst

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS

Clicking anywhere on the screen or selecting any option will bring the learner to slide 18.

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Knowledge Check Answer

Which of the following Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) has a high probability of long-term noise exposure in service?

Answer: Gas Turbine System Technician

A Navy MOS of Gas Turbine System Technician has a high probability of long-term noise exposure in service. This MOS would meet element two necessary to request a hearing exam for direct service connection.

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. —Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)

SLIDE NOTES

The answer is Gas Turbine System Technician. A Navy MOS of Gas Turbine System Technician has a high probability of long-term noise exposure in service. This MOS would meet element two necessary to request a hearing exam for direct service connection.

REFERENCES

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. —Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)

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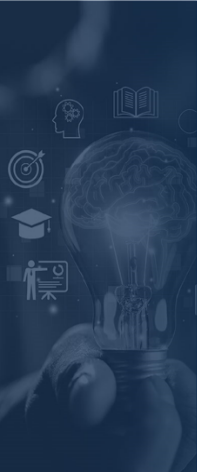
National Guard and Reserve Duty

Claims for SC of hearing loss and/or tinnitus due to service in the National Guard or Reserves should be considered under the same criteria as any claim for SC of hearing loss and/or tinnitus. The condition must be causally related to service.

- Consider SC based on the potential relationship to periods of active duty or active duty for training (ADT).
- Entitlement to SC may be established if there has been a decrease in auditory acuity due to military duties as a member of the National Guard or Reserves.
- SC for hearing loss and/or tinnitus can be established for inactive duty for training (IADT) if the condition can be linked to an injury during IADT as shown by the nature of service, MOS, lay evidence, or other competent evidence.

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Knowledge Check



A 42-year-old Marine Corps Veteran served in Iraq in the infantry for four years. Ten years after an honorable discharge from service, he files a claim for progressive difficulty in hearing that he believes is related to his service. The entrance and exit physical show no hearing loss. Private medical records show a current diagnosis of hearing loss.

What actions would you take?

- | | |
|----|---|
| A. | Concede noise exposure as Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing shows a high probability of exposure to hazardous noise |
| B. | Order a VA Audiologic Examination |
| C. | Make the claim Ready for Decision and let the RVSR determine if an exam is needed |
| D. | Both A & B |

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS

Clicking anywhere on the screen or selecting any option will bring the learner to slide 21.

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Knowledge Check Answer

A 42-year-old Marine Corps Veteran served in Iraq in the infantry for 4 years. Ten years after an honorable discharge from service, he files a claim for progressive difficulty in hearing that he believes is related to his service. The entrance and exit physical show no hearing loss. Private medical records show a current diagnosis of hearing loss. What actions would you take?

Answer: ☒ D. ☐ Both A & B

Concede noise exposure as the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing shows a high probability of exposure to hazardous noise for infantry. A claim for hearing loss is acceptable lay evidence that the claimant is reporting the symptom of hearing loss. In most instances, when noise exposure is conceded due to MOS, this will also satisfy the indication of association between service and current disability for the purposes of finding an examination necessary.

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.d. — Requesting Audiometric Examinations and Medical Opinions](#)

SLIDE NOTES

Answer D: Both A and B – Concede noise exposure as Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing shows high probability of exposure to hazardous noise and order a VA audiologic examination.

Concede noise exposure as the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing shows a high probability of exposure to hazardous noise for infantry. A claim for hearing loss is acceptable lay evidence that the claimant is reporting the symptom of hearing loss. In most instances, when noise exposure is conceded due to MOS, this will also satisfy the indication of association between service and current disability for the purposes of finding an examination necessary.

REFERENCES

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.d. — Requesting Audiometric Examinations and Medical Opinions](#)

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Topic Three

Examinations

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Examination and Medical Opinion for Hearing Loss and Tinnitus

Where the question of SC is at issue, request an audiometric examination and/or medical opinion when necessary under [38 CFR 3.159\(c\)\(4\) — Providing Medical Examinations or Obtaining Medical Opinions](#).

Establishment of an event, injury, or disease in service is fact-specific. Even if there is documentation of an in-service illness, injury, or event involving the ears or hearing, the Duty MOS Noise Exposure listing and evidence of combat service should still be considered.

REFERENCES

[38 CFR 3.159\(c\)\(4\) — Providing Medical Examinations or Obtaining Medical Opinions](#)

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MOS Information in Exam Request

When noise exposure is conceded based on the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing, include the level of probability conceded (high, moderate, low) in the information provided to the examiner in the body of the examination request.

If noise exposure is conceded based on engagement in combat with the enemy, include this detail in the information provided to the examiner in the body of the examination request.

If an examination and/or opinion are otherwise necessary based on an event, injury, or disease, also include the probable level of exposure to hazardous noise associated with the Veteran's documented duty position in the examination request remarks.

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.d. — Requesting Audiometric Examinations and Medical Opinions](#)

REFERENCES

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.d. — Requesting Audiometric Examinations and Medical Opinions](#)

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Exam Requests

- For direct service connection based on MOS, select Audio Special Language based on MOS-Related Hazardous Noise Exposure

Is a Medical Opinion Needed?

-- Select Medical Opinion --

Select Medical Opinion --

Aggravation of a non-service connected disability by a service connected disability

Aggravation of a pre-existing condition

Audio Special Language based on MOS-Related Hazardous Noise Exposure

Combat

Compensation under 38 U.S.C. 1151

Direct service connection

- Accurately enter the Veteran's branch, MOS, and combat service (if combat is shown)

Audio Special Language based on MOS-Related Hazardous Noise Exposure

Small Arms/Artillery Repairer (91F) (Formerly 45B)

Military Branch: Army Military Rank: Enlisted

Military Occupation Specialty: Small Arms/Artillery Repairer (91F) (Formerly 45B)

Document Type: 2B-1905I - Disposition of Supplies (Chapter 31)

Document Repository: eFolder

Location in Document:

Note: Hearing loss exams are ACE eligible unless an exception applies.

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Hearing Loss and TERA

- Hearing loss is *not* considered a physical trauma under the TERA exception for physical trauma (exception #1). TERA medical opinions *must be requested* for hearing loss when a TERA memo is positive for exposure.
- A claim for SC encompasses all potential theories of SC, whether claimed or unclaimed. All claims must be liberally read to consider other potential theories of SC.
 - [M21-1 II.iii.1.A.2.f. — Considering Unclaimed Theories of SC](#)

FAQs about TERA and Hearing Loss

[PACT Act — Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

REFERENCES

[PACT Act - Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

[M21-1 II.iii.1.A.2.f. — Considering Unclaimed Theories of SC](#)

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Qualification Requirements of Examiners for Hearing Loss and Tinnitus

Hearing loss examinations must be completed by a state-licensed audiologist. A hearing loss examination is needed for an initial examination for tinnitus.

If only a tinnitus examination is being requested, the examination may be conducted by either an audiologist or non-audiologist clinician, if a hearing loss examination is of record.

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Requesting Medical Opinions for Tinnitus

A medical opinion is not required to establish direct SC for claimed tinnitus if:

- STRs document the original complaints and/or diagnosis of tinnitus
- there is current medical evidence of a diagnosis of tinnitus, or the Veteran competently and credibly reports current tinnitus, and
- the Veteran claims continuity of tinnitus since service or there are records or other competent and credible evidence of continuity of tinnitus diagnosis or symptomatology.

REFERENCES

[V.iii.2.B.3.b. Requesting Medical Opinions for Tinnitus](#)

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Knowledge Check

Even if there is documentation of an in-service illness, injury, or event involving the ears or hearing, the Duty MOS Noise Exposure listing and evidence of combat service should still be considered.

Select one:

True

False

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS

Clicking anywhere on the screen or selecting any option will bring the learner to slide 30.

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Knowledge Check Answer

Even if there is documentation of an in-service illness, injury, or event involving the ears or hearing, the Duty MOS Noise Exposure listing and evidence of combat service should still be considered.

Answer: **True**

All theories of service connection should be considered. Therefore, even if there is documentation of an in-service illness, injury, or event involving the ears or hearing, we should also consider the Duty MOS Noise Exposure listing and evidence of combat service.

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. — Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)

SLIDE NOTES

Answer: True.

All theories of service connection should be considered. Therefore, even if there is documentation of an in-service illness, injury, or event involving the ears or hearing, we should also consider the Duty MOS Noise Exposure listing and evidence of combat service.

REFERENCES

[M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. — Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)

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Would you like to know more?

- [38 CFR 3.159— Department of Veterans Affairs Assistance in Developing Claims](#)
- [38 CFR 3.309 — Disease Subject to Presumptive Service Connection](#)
- [38 CFR 3.385 — Disability Due to Impaired Hearing](#)
- [M21-1 II.iii.1.A.2.f. — Considering Unclaimed Theories of SC](#)
- [M21-1 V.iii.2.B. — Conditions of the Auditory System](#)
- [M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.b. — Considering the Duty MOS Noise Exposure Listing and Combat Duties](#)
- [M21-1 V.iii.2.B.1.d. — Requesting Audiometric Examinations and Medical Opinions](#)
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REFERENCES

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