



MENTAL HEALTH

INSOMNIA: SYMPTOM OR STANDALONE DISORDER?

The label is not the deciding point. Diagnosis, cause, functional impact, and the pyramiding rule determine the pathway.

START WITH THE CAUSE

Insomnia is often evidence of another condition's severity.

A separate mental-health evaluation requires a distinct DSM-5 insomnia disorder and a supported service-connection pathway.

TWO PATHWAYS

SYMPTOM OR STANDALONE DISORDER?

PATHWAY 1: SYMPTOM

Sleep disruption is caused by or part of another condition.

- PTSD, depression, or anxiety
- Sleep apnea or another sleep disorder
- Chronic pain or neurological disease
- Medication or treatment effects

Result:

The sleep impairment is ordinarily considered inside the underlying condition's evaluation.

OR

PATHWAY 2: STANDALONE

A qualified clinician diagnoses DSM-5 insomnia disorder after evaluating other explanations.

- Current distinct diagnosis
- Qualifying event, onset, or symptoms in service
- Medical nexus to service
- No other condition better explains the insomnia

Result:

If service connected, VA uses the mental-health formula through an analogous diagnostic code.

NO DOUBLE COUNTING

38 C.F.R. Section 4.14 prohibits rating the same manifestation twice. A separate insomnia label does not create a separate evaluation when the sleep impairment is already compensated.

GAP CHECK

QUESTIONS THE RECORD SHOULD ANSWER

1

WHAT IS THE DIAGNOSIS?

A sleep complaint, a symptom of another disability, or DSM-5 insomnia disorder?

2

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Mental disorder, breathing-related sleep disorder, pain, medication, neurological condition, or no identified cause?

3

WHERE IS IT RATED?

Inside the primary disability, or as a separately service-connected mental disorder?

4

IS THE SAME IMPAIRMENT COUNTED TWICE?

Check whether sleep disruption is already part of another assigned evaluation.

5

HOW DOES IT AFFECT FUNCTION?

Frequency, duration, daytime fatigue, concentration, reliability, and relationships.

6

IS THE MEDICAL RATIONALE COMPLETE?

The opinion should address differential causes, not merely repeat the word insomnia.

