

AGGRAVATION
MEDICAL OPINION GUIDE

Worsening is a separate medical question from causation.



AGGRAVATION

A negative opinion on causation does not automatically answer aggravation. The provider should separately determine whether a service-connected disability caused an incremental increase in the severity of another condition.

SECONDARY CONDITION EXISTS



PRIMARY DISABILITY CAUSES ADDITIONAL SEVERITY

BEFORE

BASELINE EVIDENCE

Describe severity before the increase when it can be medically established from records, testing, treatment, or credible history.

AFTER

CURRENT SEVERITY

Identify the present symptoms, testing, treatment intensity, and functional effects.

DIFFERENCE

ATTRIBUTABLE WORSENING

Explain the incremental increase medically linked to the service-connected condition.

OPINION REQUIREMENTS

QUESTIONS THAT NEED SEPARATE ANSWERS

1 DID THE PRIMARY CAUSE THE SECONDARY CONDITION?

Answer causation directly, even if the conclusion is negative.

2 DID THE PRIMARY AGGRAVATE THE SECONDARY CONDITION?

Answer incremental worsening separately.

3 WHAT EVIDENCE SHOWS WORSENING?

Use chronology, testing, treatment changes, flare patterns, and functional decline.

4 WHAT PORTION IS ATTRIBUTABLE?

Separate natural progression and other causes when the medical evidence allows.

5 IS THE OPINION IMPOSING PERMANENCE?

Aggravation is not limited to permanent worsening under Ward v. Wilkie.

PROPER ANALYSIS

The secondary condition existed independently, but the service-connected primary disability medically caused additional severity.

INCOMPLETE ANALYSIS

“The primary condition did not cause the secondary condition, so secondary service connection is denied.”

BASELINE IS AN EVIDENCE QUESTION

Document the pre-aggravation level when possible. Do not turn difficulty identifying a baseline into a substitute for answering whether aggravation occurred.

CAUSATION AND AGGRAVATION ARE SEPARATE. A competent opinion should not answer one and silently treat the other as resolved.

