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## How is Back Pain Evaluated in Social Security Disability Cases?

Even though back pain is one of the most common medical conditions reported by individuals applying for Social Security disability benefits, it is difficult for the Social Security Administration to evaluate it. The severity of the back injury must be verified with:

1. Objective medical evidence
2. The treating physician's opinion or medical notes
3. Information you provide regarding how the medical condition affects the ability to perform daily activities.

Unfortunately, there are times when the test results, examinations, and clinical findings may not accurately reflect symptoms such as chronic pain, muscle spasms, and limited mobility or range of motion. The treating physician's written opinion can substantiate your medical condition and explain why there is a discrepancy between your back pain symptoms and the objective medical evidence. During a disability hearing, you can describe your daily routine, symptoms of the condition, functional limitations, and steps you must take to alleviate the pain.

## What You Need to Know about Consultative Examinations

The Social Security Administration (SSA) orders a person to take a consultative examination when there isn't enough medical evidence to help them make a decision regarding the disability claim. The consultative exams are used to assess physical and psychological conditions. The type of exams and tests administered to the claimant are dependent on the discretion of the disability examiner or administrative law judge.

Generally, the consultative examinations are ordered if the claimant hasn't been properly diagnosed or treated for the medical condition. The exam may also be necessary if the SSA hasn't received the medical documents requested from the treating physician or healthcare facility.



Consultative exams aren't the best way to obtain accurate information because the independent physicians conducting the exam don't have the same knowledge and insight regarding the claimant's condition as a doctor who has been treating the claimant for an extended period of time.

## Why Should I Keep a Diary if I File a Disability Claim?

The physical or mental limitations caused by a medical condition and the way you respond to treatment are very subjective. As a result, the clinical tests and exams may not accurately reflect the pain you experience on a daily basis. Using a diary to document the symptoms of your condition adds great value to your claim, with details regarding:



1. The severity of your pain
2. Where the pain is located
3. The effects of treatment
4. How the medical condition impedes your ability to perform certain tasks

You can become an active participant in your treatment by sharing information from the diary with your physician. It will help the doctor understand if you are making any progress or if your treatment plan needs to be modified.

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