Getting Your Records, Keeping a Diary, and Showing How Your Injury Affects Daily Life

This page is general information about California workers' compensation. It is not legal advice about your case, and reading it or contacting us does not create an attorney client relationship. Rules change, and every case is different. If you have a lawyer, talk to your lawyer before acting on anything here.

Why this matters

Permanent disability in California is measured largely by how an injury limits ordinary daily activities. Doctors rate what is in the records and what you can describe clearly. Good records and an honest, specific diary make it much harder for important facts to be missed. Write down only what is true, and include good days as well as bad ones. Accuracy is what makes a diary believable.

Part 1: Getting your records

Your own medical records. Under California law, a provider must let you inspect your records within 5 working days of a written request, and must send copies within 15 days. Paper copies cost no more than 25 cents a page (Health and Safety Code section 123110). Ask each provider in writing for all records, reports, imaging reports and work status notes about your injury, from the date of injury to the present. Many health systems also let you download records from your online patient account.

From the claims administrator. Write to the adjuster and ask for copies of every medical report on your claim and a benefit printout showing every payment made to you or on your behalf. Keep a copy of your request and note the date you sent it.

Keep everything together. Use one folder or binder, in date order. Keep every envelope, since the postmark date can matter. Bring the whole folder to every appointment with a doctor, a QME, or a lawyer.

Part 2: Keeping a daily diary

A few minutes a day is enough. Use the diary page below, a notebook, or notes on your phone. Each entry should cover:

- The date, and your pain level from 0 (none) to 10 (worst imaginable), morning and evening.
- What you did, and what you could not do or had to stop, with specifics (“stood 15 minutes at the sink, then had to sit”).
- Swelling, numbness, falls or near falls, and anything new.
- Medications taken and any side effects; braces, ice or other aids used.
- Medical appointments, what the doctor said, and what was requested.
- Every call or letter with the claims administrator: date, name, and what was said.

Part 3: Describing the impact on daily activities

Doctors use a standard list of daily activity areas (AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, Fifth Edition, Table 1-2). For each one, compare how you did it before the injury with how you do it now. Concrete comparisons are the most useful: “before, I carried 50 pound boxes all day; now I cannot lift a full grocery bag.” Name someone who has seen the change.

Area	Examples	Questions to answer
Self care	Bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, eating	Do you need help or extra time? Do you sit to dress?
Physical activity	Standing, sitting, walking, stairs, bending, kneeling, reaching, lifting, carrying	How long can you stand, sit or walk before you must stop? How much can you lift?
Hand activities	Gripping, pinching, holding, carrying, typing	Can you open jars, button clothes, hold a phone?
Travel	Driving, riding as a passenger, getting in and out of a car, errands	How far can you drive before symptoms start?
Sleep	Falling asleep, waking from pain, restful sleep	How many hours do you sleep now compared with before?
Communication and senses	Writing, typing, concentration, reading, numbness, balance, hearing, vision	Do you lose your place reading? Drop things from numbness?
Work	The specific duties of your job	Which duties can you no longer do, or do only with help?
Home and family	Housework, cooking, yard work, caring for family, exercise, hobbies, social life	What have you stopped doing, or now need help with?

Bring it to every appointment. Give a copy to your treating doctor, and describe the same limits at any QME exam. If you send anything to a QME before the exam, send a copy to the adjuster at least 20 days before it goes to the doctor.

Free help: the state Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) has Information and Assistance Officers in every district office who help injured workers who do not have a lawyer. Call 1-800-736-7401 or visit www.dir.ca.gov/dwc.

Daily Diary (print extra copies as needed)

Date	Pain AM / PM (0 to 10)	What I did, and what I could not do	Medications, aids	Appointments, calls, letters

Daily Activities: Before and Now

Activity	Before the injury	Now	Who has seen this
Bathing and dressing			
Standing			
Sitting			
Walking			
Stairs			
Bending, kneeling, reaching			
Lifting and carrying			
Gripping and hand use			
Driving and errands			
Sleep			
Work duties			
Housework and family care			
Exercise and hobbies			