Can I Enter the Military if I have a Disability?

Civilian, non-uniform member jobs within the Department of Defense (DoD), are subject to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which bars discrimination in employment (and other matters) by any entity that receives federal funding. There are many people with disabilities serving in all branches of the military in civilian positions. For information on civilian jobs see: https://godefense.cpms.osd.mil/employment.aspx

When it comes to serving in the military, the Armed Forces are not subject to the anti-discrimination requirements of the Americans with Disabilities (ADA). Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Department of Defense regulations are also exempt from disability anti-discrimination policies and procedures. Court decisions have determined that the military’s statutory (legal) authority to prescribe physical requirements for its members supersedes anti-discrimination laws (i.e., those laws don’t apply). There is no requirement for any branch of the armed services to provide reasonable accommodations (e.g., extended testing time, reading questions aloud, physical readiness etc.). Military regulations also allow for the rejection of someone for service who has deficits (gaps) in academic skills that interfere with school or work after the age of 12.

Potential Disqualifications from Service in the Armed Forces

If you have a medical condition, you must disclose it to your recruiter who will be able to tell you whether or not the condition is a permanent disqualification, or a waiver can be requested. If you do not get an official waiver and your condition is discovered later, you will likely be dishonorably discharged for fraudulent (false) enlistment. There are many medical conditions that can disqualify you from service. For example, ADHD is a disqualifying condition if you have used medication within the last 12 months. Use of alcohol or drugs can also disqualify you depending on the substance used and when it was last used. https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/disqualifiers-medical-conditions.html

Legal issues can disqualify you because moral character standards apply in the military. Some offenses (crimes) automatically disqualify you, but a waiver can be sought in other circumstances. Your credit history may also be a factor. For more information see: https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/disqualifiers-law.html
Qualifications for Joining the Armed Forces

The below are related to enlisted service. Requirements for entering a military academy or to be an officer vary. Parent consent to enlist is required if you are 17.

**ARMY**: Must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident between the ages of 17 and 34 with a high school diploma or GED and no more than two dependents. You must pass the Armed Services Vocational Battery (ASVAB) test and the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) medical exam, and meet physical, mental, and moral standards. [https://www.goarmy.com/learn/army-requirements-and-qualifications.html](https://www.goarmy.com/learn/army-requirements-and-qualifications.html)

**NAVY**: Must be a U.S. citizen or resident alien between the ages of 17 and 39, with a high school diploma or GED, and no more than two dependents. You must meet physical, mental, and moral standards, have a qualifying score on the ASVAB test, and pass the MEPS medical exam. [https://www.navy.com/joining-navy-if-you-havent-served](https://www.navy.com/joining-navy-if-you-havent-served)

**AIR FORCE**: Must be a U.S. Citizen or permanent resident between the ages of 17 and 39, have a high school diploma or GED, and no more than two dependents. You must also pass the ASVAB and the MEPS medical exam and meet physical, mental, and moral standards. [https://www.airforce.com/how-to-join/prepare-for-success/meet-requirements](https://www.airforce.com/how-to-join/prepare-for-success/meet-requirements)

**MARINES**: Must be a U.S. citizen or resident alien between the ages of 17 and 29, have a high school diploma, and pass the ASVAB test and the MEPS medical exam. A waiver is needed for an applicant who has any dependents under the age of 18. [https://www.marines.com/becoming-a-marine/overview.html](https://www.marines.com/becoming-a-marine/overview.html)

**COAST GUARD**: Must be a U.S. citizen or resident alien between the ages of 17-27 with a high school diploma and no more than two dependents. You must pass the ASVAB test and the MEPS medical exam. You have to be willing to serve on or around the water. [https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/coast-guard-recruiting-faqs.html](https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/coast-guard-recruiting-faqs.html)

The National Guard is Another Potential Option

If you are interested in serving in the military but not in a full-time role, you may be interested in checking out the Army National Guard or the Air Force (Air) National Guard.

Members of the Guard conduct their military training part-time, while going about their normal civilian life (working, going to school, volunteering, etc.).

For information, including entrance and commitment requirements for both Guards branches, see [https://militarybenefits.info/national-guard](https://militarybenefits.info/national-guard) or

Army National Guard [https://www.nationalguard.com/select-your-state/VA](https://www.nationalguard.com/select-your-state/VA)

Air National Guard [https://www.goang.com/](https://www.goang.com/)

**PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with** families, schools and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

**For more information about us, please contact:**

8003 Forbes Place, Suite 310 Springfield, VA 22151
800-869-6782 / 703-923-0010
[www.peatc.org](http://www.peatc.org)

The contents of this factsheet were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, #H328M140013-18. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer. PEATC is not a legal services agency and cannot provide legal advice or legal representation. Any information contained in this factsheet is not intended as legal advice and should not be used as a substitution for legal advice.