



MEDICARE PODIATRY SERVICES



TARGET AUDIENCE

Medicare Fee-For-Service Health Care Professionals

OVERVIEW

This fact sheet is designed to provide education on Medicare coverage of podiatry services. It includes an overview of routine foot care related to underlying systemic conditions, billing guidelines, and a list of resources.

The Hyperlink Table, at the end of this document, provides the complete URL for each hyperlink.

MEDICARE COVERED FOOT CARE SERVICES

According to the [Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 290](#), Medicare covered foot care services only include medically necessary and reasonable foot care.

EXCLUSIONS FROM COVERAGE

Certain foot care related services are not generally covered by Medicare. In general, the following services, whether performed by a podiatrist, osteopath, or doctor of medicine, and without regard to the difficulty or complexity of the procedure, are not covered by Medicare:

1. Treatment of Flat Foot

The term flat foot is defined as a condition in which one or more arches of the foot have flattened out. Services or devices directed toward the care or correction of such conditions, including the prescription of supportive devices, are not covered.

2. Routine Foot Care

Routine foot care is excluded from coverage, except as discussed below under Conditions That Might Justify Coverage. The following services are normally considered routine and not covered by Medicare:

- The cutting or removal of corns and calluses
- The trimming, cutting, clipping, or debriding of nails
- Other hygienic and preventive maintenance care, such as cleaning and soaking the feet, the use of skin creams to maintain skin tone of either ambulatory or bedfast patients, and any other service performed in the absence of localized illness, injury, or symptoms involving the foot

3. Supportive Devices for Feet

Generally, Medicare will not cover orthopedic shoes and other supportive devices for the feet, unless it is an integral part of a leg brace and its expense is included as part of the cost of the brace. Also, a narrow exception permits coverage of therapeutic shoes and inserts for certain patients with diabetes.

CONDITIONS THAT MIGHT JUSTIFY COVERAGE

The presence of a systemic condition, such as metabolic, neurologic, or peripheral vascular disease, may require specialized foot care by a professional that, in the absence of such condition(s), would be considered routine (and, therefore, excluded from coverage). Accordingly, routine foot care may be covered when systemic condition(s) result in severe circulatory embarrassment or areas of diminished sensation in the patient's legs or feet. In these instances, certain foot care procedures that are otherwise considered routine (for example, cutting or removing corns and calluses, or trimming, cutting, clipping, or debriding nails) may pose a hazard when performed by a non-professional on patients with such systemic conditions.

The following metabolic, neurologic, and peripheral vascular diseases (with synonyms in parentheses) most commonly represent the underlying conditions that may justify coverage for routine foot care. Note: This list is not comprehensive.

- Diabetes mellitus *
- Arteriosclerosis obliterans (A.S.O., arteriosclerosis of the extremities, occlusive peripheral arteriosclerosis)
- Buerger's disease (thromboangiitis obliterans)
- Chronic thrombophlebitis *

- Peripheral neuropathies involving the feet
 - Associated with malnutrition and vitamin deficiency *
 - Malnutrition (general, pellagra)
 - Alcoholism
 - Malabsorption (celiac disease, tropical sprue)
 - Pernicious anemia
 - Associated with carcinoma *
 - Associated with diabetes mellitus *
 - Associated with drugs and toxins *
 - Associated with multiple sclerosis *
 - Associated with uremia (chronic renal disease) *
 - Associated with traumatic injury
 - Associated with leprosy or neurosyphilis
 - Associated with hereditary disorders
 - Hereditary sensory radicular neuropathy
 - Angiokeratoma corporis diffusum (Fabry's)
 - Amyloid neuropathy

When the patient's condition is one of those designated above by an asterisk (*), routine procedures are covered only if the patient is under the active care of a doctor of medicine or osteopathy who documents the condition.

The following services may also be covered:

- The treatment of warts (including plantar warts) on the foot is covered to the same extent as services provided for the treatment of warts located elsewhere on the body.
- In the absence of a systemic condition, treatment of mycotic nails may be covered. The treatment of mycotic nails for an ambulatory patient is covered only when the physician attending the patient's mycotic condition documents that (1) there is clinical evidence of mycosis of the toenail, and (2) the patient has marked limitation of ambulation, pain, or secondary infection resulting from the thickening and dystrophy of the infected toenail plate.
- The treatment of mycotic nails for a non-ambulatory patient is covered only when the physician attending the patient's mycotic condition documents that (1) there is clinical evidence of mycosis of the toenail, and (2) the patient suffers from pain or secondary infection resulting from the thickening and dystrophy of the infected toenail plate.



PRESUMPTION OF COVERAGE FOR ROUTINE SERVICES

Upon evaluating whether routine services are reimbursable, a presumption of coverage may be made where the evidence available shows certain physical and/or clinical findings are consistent with the diagnosis and indicate severe peripheral involvement. Refer to the [Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 290](#), for more information about applying this presumption.

When the routine services are rendered by a podiatrist, the Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) contractor may deem the active care requirement met. However, the claim or other available evidence must indicate that the patient has seen an Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.) for treatment and/or evaluation of the complicating disease process six months before the routine-type services were rendered.

The Medicare FFS contractor may also accept the podiatrist's statement that the diagnosing and treating M.D. or D.O. also concurs with the podiatrist's findings about the severity of the peripheral involvement indicated.

FOOT CARE FOR PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC DISEASE

Diabetic Sensory Neuropathy: Loss of Protective Sensation (LOPS)

Medicare covers an evaluation (examination and treatment) of the feet no more often than every six months for beneficiaries with a documented diagnosis of diabetic sensory neuropathy and LOPS, as long as he or she has not seen a foot care specialist for some other reason in the interim.

The diagnosis of diabetic sensory neuropathy with LOPS should be established and documented prior to foot care coverage. Other causes of peripheral neuropathy should be considered and investigated by the primary care physician before initiating or referring foot care for persons with LOPS.

Refer to the National Coverage Determination (NCD) Services Provided for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Diabetic Sensory Neuropathy with Loss of Protective Sensation (LOPS) (aka Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy) for more information. This NCD is available at <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/ncd-details.aspx?NCDId=171>.

LOWER EXTREMITY WOUND CARE

Electrostimulation and Electromagnetic Therapy for Wounds

CMS covers the use of electrical stimulation and electromagnetic therapy for chronic Stage III and Stage IV pressure ulcers, arterial ulcers, diabetic ulcers, and venous stasis ulcers when certain conditions are met.

For more detailed information, refer to National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Electrical Stimulation (ES) and Electromagnetic Therapy for the Treatment of Wounds, which is available at <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/ncd-details.aspx?NCDId=131>.

HYPERBARIC OXYGEN (HBO) THERAPY FOR HYPOXIC WOUNDS AND DIABETIC WOUNDS OF THE LOWER EXTREMITIES

Hyperbaric Oxygen (HBO) therapy for diabetic wounds of the lower extremities is covered in patients who meet each of the following three criteria:

- Type I or Type II Diabetes and has a lower extremity wound that is due to diabetes
- A wound classified as Wagner grade III or higher
- Failed an adequate course of standard wound therapy (defined below)

The use of HBO therapy is covered as adjunctive therapy only after there are no measurable signs of healing for at least 30 days of treatment with standard wound therapy. The therapy must be used in addition to standard wound care. Failure to respond to standard wound care occurs when there are no measurable signs of healing for at least 30 consecutive days. Wounds must be evaluated at least every 30 days during administration of HBO therapy. Continued treatment with HBO therapy is not covered if measurable signs of healing have not been demonstrated within any 30-day period of treatment.

For more information about HBO therapy for diabetic wounds of the lower extremities, refer to the NCD for Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, which is available at <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/ncd-details.aspx?NCDId=12&ncdver=3&NCAId=37>.

ADDITIONAL BILLING GUIDELINES

Claims Involving Complicating Conditions

- When submitting claims for services furnished to Medicare beneficiaries who have complicating conditions, the name of the M.D. or D.O. who diagnosed the complicating condition must be submitted with the claim, along with the approximate date that the beneficiary was last seen by the indicated physician (when active care is required).
- Carefully document any convincing evidence that shows non-professional performance of a service would have been hazardous for the beneficiary because of an underlying systemic disease. Stating that the beneficiary has a complicating condition, such as diabetes, does not of itself indicate the severity of the condition.
- Payment may be made for initial diagnostic services performed in connection with a specific symptom or complaint if it appears that its treatment would be covered, even though the resulting diagnosis may be one requiring only non-covered care.

- The exclusion of foot care is determined by the nature of the service, not according to who provides the service. When an itemized bill shows both covered services and non-covered services that are not integrally related to the covered service, the portion of the charges attributed to the non-covered services should be denied.
- Payment is sometimes made for incidental non-covered services that are performed as a necessary and integral part of, and secondary to, a covered procedure. For example, if toenails must be trimmed in order to apply a cast to a fractured foot, then the charge for the trimming of nails would be covered. However, a separately itemized charge for this excluded service would not be allowed. If you have questions, your Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) may have more information. Find their website at <https://go.cms.gov/MAC-website-list>.
- Information about coverage of Incident to Physician's Professional Services can also be found in the [Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 60 – Services and Supplies](#).

Therapeutic Shoes for Individuals with Diabetes

- Coverage of depth or custom-molded therapeutic shoes and inserts for individuals with diabetes is available.
- This type of diabetic shoe is covered if the requirements specified in the [Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 140](#), regarding certification and prescription are met.
- This benefit provides for a pair of diabetic shoes, each equipped so that the affected and remaining limb is protected, even if only one foot suffers from diabetic foot disease.
- Claims for diabetic therapeutic shoes are processed by Durable Medical Equipment Medicare Administrative Contractors (DME MACs). Therapeutic shoes for diabetics are not DME and are not considered DME or orthotics; however, there is a separate category of coverage under Medicare Part B.

Scope of Practice

The scope of the practice for podiatry is defined by State law. Therefore, individual state laws should be followed in determining a specific podiatrist's (or doctor of podiatric medicine) scope of practice.

RESOURCES

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT...	RESOURCE
Coverage and Billing of the Diagnosis and Treatment of Peripheral Neuropathy with Loss of Protective Sensation in People with Diabetes Program Memorandum	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Transmittals/downloads/AB02096.pdf
MAC Website List	https://go.cms.gov/MAC-website-list
Medical Review of Medicare Payments for Nail Debridement Services Program Memorandum	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Transmittals/downloads/AB02105.pdf
Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Publication 100-2, Chapter 15	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/bp102c15.pdf
Medicare Coverage Database (NCDs and LCDs)	https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/
Medicare National Coverage Determinations (NCD) Manual	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Internet-Only-Manuals-IOMs-Items/CMS014961.html
Medicare Program Integrity Manual	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Internet-Only-Manuals-IOMs-Items/CMS019033.html
MLN Matters® Article #MM3430, Reasonable Charge Update for 2005 Splints, Casts, Dialysis Supplies, Dialysis Equipment, Therapeutic Shoes and Certain Intraocular Lenses	https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Medicare-Learning-Network-MLN/MLNMattersArticles/Downloads/MM3430.pdf
MLN Matters® Special Edition Article #SE1113, Foot Care Coverage Guidelines	https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Medicare-Learning-Network-MLN/MLNMattersArticles/downloads/SE1113.pdf

HYPERLINKS

EMBEDDED HYPERLINK	WEB ADDRESS
Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 290	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/bp102c15.pdf
Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 60 – Services and Supplies	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/bp102c15.pdf
Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 15, Section 140	https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/bp102c15.pdf

[Medicare Learning Network® Product Disclaimer](#)

The Medicare Learning Network®, MLN Connects®, and MLN Matters® are registered trademarks of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS).