

# Clinical Appropriateness Guidelines: Advanced Imaging

Appropriate Use Criteria: Quantitative CT (QCT) Bone Mineral  
Densitometry

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Proprietary

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# Description and Application of the Guidelines



AIM's Clinical Appropriateness Guidelines (hereinafter "AIM's Clinical Appropriateness Guidelines" or the "Guidelines") are designed to assist providers in making the most appropriate treatment decision for a specific clinical condition for an individual. As used by AIM, the Guidelines establish objective and evidence-based, where possible, criteria for medical necessity determinations. In the process, multiple functions are accomplished:

- To establish criteria for when services are medically necessary
- To assist the practitioner as an educational tool
- To encourage standardization of medical practice patterns
- To curtail the performance of inappropriate and/or duplicate services
- To advocate for patient safety concerns
- To enhance the quality of healthcare
- To promote the most efficient and cost-effective use of services

AIM's guideline development process complies with applicable accreditation standards, including the requirement that the Guidelines be developed with involvement from appropriate providers with current clinical expertise relevant to the Guidelines under review and be based on the most up to date clinical principles and best practices. Relevant citations are included in the "References" section attached to each Guideline. AIM reviews all of its Guidelines at least annually.

AIM makes its Guidelines publicly available on its website twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Copies of AIM's Clinical Appropriateness Guidelines are also available upon oral or written request. Although the Guidelines are publicly-available, AIM considers the Guidelines to be important, proprietary information of AIM, which cannot be sold, assigned, leased, licensed, reproduced or distributed without the written consent of AIM.

AIM applies objective and evidence-based criteria and takes individual circumstances and the local delivery system into account when determining the medical appropriateness of health care services. The AIM Guidelines are just guidelines for the provision of specialty health services. These criteria are designed to guide both providers and reviewers to the most appropriate services based on a patient's unique circumstances. In all cases, clinical judgment consistent with the standards of good medical practice should be used when applying the Guidelines. Guideline determinations are made based on the information provided at the time of the request. It is expected that medical necessity decisions may change as new information is provided or based on unique aspects of the patient's condition. The treating clinician has final authority and responsibility for treatment decisions regarding the care of the patient and for justifying and demonstrating the existence of medical necessity for the requested service. The Guidelines are not a substitute for the experience and judgment of a physician or other health care professionals. Any clinician seeking to apply or consult the Guidelines is expected to use independent medical judgment in the context of individual clinical circumstances to determine any patient's care or treatment.

The Guidelines do not address coverage, benefit or other plan specific issues. If requested by a health plan, AIM will review requests based on health plan medical policy/guidelines in lieu of AIM's Guidelines.

The Guidelines may also be used by the health plan or by AIM for purposes of provider education, or to review the medical necessity of services by any provider who has been notified of the need for medical necessity review, due to billing practices or claims that are not consistent with other providers in terms of frequency or some other manner.

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# Administrative Guideline: Ordering of Multiple Studies



Requests for multiple imaging studies to evaluate a suspected or identified condition and requests for repeated imaging of the same anatomic area are subject to additional review to avoid unnecessary or inappropriate imaging.

## Simultaneous Ordering of Multiple Studies

In many situations, ordering multiple imaging studies at the same time is not clinically appropriate because:

- Current literature and/or standards of medical practice support that one of the requested imaging studies is more appropriate in the clinical situation presented; or
- One of the imaging studies requested is more likely to improve patient outcomes based on current literature and/or standards of medical practice; or
- Appropriateness of additional imaging is dependent on the results of the lead study.

When multiple imaging studies are ordered, the request will often require a peer-to-peer conversation to understand the individual circumstances that support the medical necessity of performing all imaging studies simultaneously.

Examples of multiple imaging studies that may require a peer-to-peer conversation include:

- CT brain and CT sinus for headache
- MRI brain and MRA brain for headache
- MRI cervical spine and MRI shoulder for pain indications
- MRI lumbar spine and MRI hip for pain indications
- MRI or CT of multiple spine levels for pain or radicular indications
- MRI foot and MRI ankle for pain indications
- Bilateral exams, particularly comparison studies

There are certain clinical scenarios where simultaneous ordering of multiple imaging studies is consistent with current literature and/or standards of medical practice. These include:

- Oncologic imaging – Considerations include the type of malignancy and the point along the care continuum at which imaging is requested
- Conditions which span multiple anatomic regions – Examples include certain gastrointestinal indications or congenital spinal anomalies

## Repeated Imaging

In general, repeated imaging of the same anatomic area should be limited to evaluation following an intervention, or when there is a change in clinical status such that imaging is required to determine next steps in management. At times, repeated imaging done with different techniques or contrast regimens may be necessary to clarify a finding seen on the original study.

Repeated imaging of the same anatomic area (with same or similar technology) may be subject to additional review in the following scenarios:

- Repeated imaging at the same facility due to motion artifact or other technical issues
- Repeated imaging requested at a different facility due to provider preference or quality concerns
- Repeated imaging of the same anatomic area (MRI or CT) based on persistent symptoms with no clinical change, treatment, or intervention since the previous study
- Repeated imaging of the same anatomical area by different providers for the same member over a short period of time

# Administrative Guideline: Pre-Test Requirements



Critical to any finding of clinical appropriateness under the guidelines for specific imaging exams is a determination that the following are true with respect to the imaging request:

- A clinical evaluation has been performed prior to the imaging request (which should include a complete history and physical exam and review of results from relevant laboratory studies, prior imaging and supplementary testing) to identify suspected or established diseases or conditions.
- **For suspected diseases or conditions:**
  - Based on the clinical evaluation, there is a reasonable likelihood of disease prior to imaging; and
  - Current literature and standards of medical practice support that the requested imaging study is the most appropriate method of narrowing the differential diagnosis generated through the clinical evaluation and can be reasonably expected to lead to a change in management of the patient; and
  - The imaging requested is reasonably expected to improve patient outcomes based on current literature and standards of medical practice.
- **For established diseases or conditions:**
  - Advanced imaging is needed to determine whether the extent or nature of the disease or condition has changed; and
  - Current literature and standards of medical practice support that the requested imaging study is the most appropriate method of determining this and can be reasonably expected to lead to a change in management of the patient; and
  - The imaging requested is reasonably expected to improve patient outcomes based on current literature and standards of medical practice.
- If these elements are not established with respect to a given request, the determination of appropriateness will most likely require a peer-to-peer conversation to understand the individual and unique facts that would supersede the pre-test requirements set forth above. During the peer-to-peer conversation, factors such as patient acuity and setting of service may also be taken into account.

# Quantitative CT (QCT) Bone Mineral Densitometry



## CPT Codes

77078..... Computed tomography, bone mineral density study, 1 or more sites; axial skeleton (e.g., hips, pelvis, spine)

## Standard Anatomic Coverage

- For central QCT, spine and hip measurements are obtained

## Imaging Considerations

- Bone mineral densitometry may be performed on the central axial skeleton (i.e., spine, femoral head, proximal femur)
- Central dual x-ray absorptiometry (DXA), also referred to as dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA), is the most commonly used test to evaluate bone mineral density and is considered the technology of choice, when available.
- QCT has a high sensitivity for detection of bone loss. However, when compared with DXA, QCT is often less readily available, more expensive and incurs higher radiation exposure.
- QCT may not be covered as a screening exam in patients at low risk for osteoporosis.

# Common Diagnostic Indications

## Initial examination – when any one of the following criteria are met

- Menopausal or post-menopausal women – as an initial examination to screen for osteoporosis
- Men of 70 years age or older, regardless of risk factors
- Anyone presenting with a fragility or pathologic fracture
- Anyone with a disease or condition associated with development of osteoporosis, including any of the following abnormalities:
  - Anorexia nervosa
  - Chronic liver disease
  - Chronic renal failure
  - Cushing's syndrome
  - Delayed menarche or untreated premature menopause
  - Heavy alcohol consumption
  - Hypercalciuria
  - Hypogonadism
  - Inflammatory bowel disease
  - Low trauma fractures or vertebral fractures
  - Malabsorption syndromes
  - Primary hyperparathyroidism
  - Prolonged immobilization
  - Radiographic evidence of osteopenia
  - Rheumatoid arthritis
  - Thyroid disease
- Anyone on a medication associated with development of osteoporosis, including but not limited to the following medications:
  - Glucocorticoids (e.g., prednisone, prednisolone, decadron, dexamethasone) – treatment for longer than 3 months
  - Phenytoin (Dilantin) – treatment for longer than 3 months
  - Heparin – treatment for longer than 1 month
  - Depo-Provera injectable contraceptive – long-standing use (longer than 2 years)
  - Lithium treatment
  - Lupron therapy
  - Cytotoxic agents which affect bone density (e.g., adjuvant chemotherapy in many premenopausal females with breast cancer)
  - Proton pump inhibitors (PPI) and histamine-2 (H2) receptor blockers for gastroesophageal reflux disease in patients over 50 years of age, under treatment for longer than 3 months
- Anyone who is considering therapy for osteoporosis, if bone mineral densitometry would facilitate the decision

## Repeat examination – when any one of the following criteria are met:

- Anyone under treatment for osteoporosis, to monitor the response to therapy for bone loss – at intervals of every 2 to 3 years
- Untreated individuals who met the criteria for initial evaluation, without significant osteopenia on prior bone densitometry and without interval increased risk for accelerated bone loss – at intervals of every 3 to 5 years

## References

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