Panniculectomy and Abdominoplasty

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE
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Coverage Policy

Coverage for abdominoplasty, panniculectomy, and cosmetic surgery varies across plans. Refer to the customer's benefit plan document for coverage details.

Panniculectomy is considered medically necessary when ALL of the following conditions are met as demonstrated on preoperative photographs:

- The pannus hangs at or below the level of the symphysis pubis.
- The pannus causes a chronic and persistent skin condition (e.g., intertriginous dermatitis, panniculitis, cellulitis or skin ulcerations) that is refractory to at least three months of medical treatment and associated with at least one episode of cellulitis requiring systemic antibiotics. In addition to good hygiene practices, treatment should include topical antifungals, topical and/or systemic corticosteroids, and/or local or systemic antibiotics.
- There is presence of a functional deficit due to a severe physical deformity or disfigurement resulting from the pannus.
- The surgery is expected to restore or improve the functional deficit.
- The pannus is interfering with activities of daily living.

Note: If the procedure is being performed following significant weight loss, in addition to meeting the criteria noted above, there should be evidence that the individual has maintained a stable weight for at least six months. If the weight loss is the result of bariatric surgery, panniculectomy should not be
performed until at least 18 months after bariatric surgery and only when weight has been stable for at least the most recent six months.

Panniculectomy is considered not medically necessary for any other indication, including but not limited to when performed primarily for ANY of the following:

- treatment of neck or back pain
- improving appearance (i.e., cosmesis)
- treating psychological symptomatology or psychosocial complaints
- when performed in conjunction with abdominal or gynecological procedures (e.g., abdominal hernia repair, hysterectomy, obesity surgery) unless criteria for panniculectomy are met separately

Abdominoplasty is considered cosmetic in nature and not medically necessary for ANY of the following indications:

- repairing abdominal wall laxity or diastasis recti
- treatment of neck or back pain
- treating psychological symptomatology or psychosocial complaints
- when performed in conjunction with abdominal or gynecological procedures (e.g., abdominal hernia repair, hysterectomy, obesity surgery)

Suction-assisted lipectomy is considered cosmetic in nature and not medically necessary when performed alone and not as part of a medically necessary panniculectomy procedure.

Overview

This Coverage Policy addresses surgical procedures performed to re-shape or remove hanging fat and skin from the abdominal area.

General Background

Abdominoplasty, also referred to in lay terms as a "tummy tuck," is a surgical procedure that tightens lax anterior abdominal wall muscles and removes excess abdominal skin and fat. This recontouring of the abdominal wall area is often performed solely to improve the appearance of a protuberant abdomen by creating a flatter, firmer abdomen. The standard abdominoplasty involves plication of the anterior rectus sheath for muscle diastasis (i.e., repair of diastasis recti) and removal of excess fat and skin. Traditional abdominoplasty can be performed as an open procedure or endoscopically. Abdominoplasty completed by endoscopic guidance is usually reserved for those patients who seek less extensive contouring of the abdominal wall. Mini-abdominoplasty, with or without liposuction, is a partial abdominoplasty involving the incision of the lower abdomen only. The procedure is generally performed solely for cosmetic purposes in order to improve the appearance of the abdominal area.

Panniculectomy, a procedure closely related to abdominoplasty, is the surgical excision of a redundant, large and/or long overhanging apron of skin and subcutaneous fat located in the lower abdominal area. The condition may accompany significant overstretching of the lax anterior abdominal wall and, hence, often occurs in morbidly obese individuals or following substantial weight loss. The severity of abdominal deformities is graded as follows (American Society of Plastic Surgeons [ASPS], 2007d):

- Grade 1: panniculus covers hairline and mons pubis but not the genitals
- Grade 2: panniculus covers genitals and upper thigh crease
- Grade 3: panniculus covers upper thigh
- Grade 4: panniculus covers mid-thigh
- Grade 5: panniculus covers knees and below
Treatment of this redundant skin and fat is often performed solely for cosmesis, to improve the appearance of the abdominal area. The presence of a massive overhanging apron of fat and skin, however, may result in chronic and persistent local skin conditions in the abdominal folds. These conditions may include intertrigo, intertriginous dermatitis, cellulitis, ulcers or tissue necrosis, or they may lead to painful inflammation of the subcutaneous adipose tissue (i.e., panniculitis). When panniculitis is severe, it may interfere with activities of daily living, such as personal hygiene and ambulation. In addition to excellent personal hygiene practices, treatment of these skin conditions generally involves topical or systemic corticosteroids, topical antifungals, and topical or systemic antibiotics. In general, a panniculectomy may be indicated when the panniculus hangs below the level of the symphysis pubis with a chronic and persistent skin condition (e.g., intertrigo, cellulitis, or tissue necrosis) that has not responded to conventional treatment and the panniculus interferes with activities of daily living Hayes, 2016; 2017). Concurrent abdominal and pelvic surgical procedures (e.g., hernia repair, hysterectomy, obesity surgery) may also be performed in the same operative setting as panniculectomy or abdominoplasty.

Diastasis Recti
Abdominoplasty is frequently performed to treat diastasis recti, a condition that involves the separation of the two sides of the rectus abdominis muscles in the midline at the linea alba. Other than its untoward cosmetic appearance, diastasis recti does not lead to any complications that require intervention. Diastasis recti has no clinical significance, does not require treatment and is not considered a true hernia (Jeyarajah and Harford, 2010). When performed for the sole purpose of repairing diastasis recti, abdominoplasty is considered cosmetic in nature and not medically necessary.

Abdominoplasty and Panniculectomy at the Time of Abdominal or Gynecological Surgeries
Abdominal surgeries such as hernia repair (i.e., incisional/ventral, epigastric or umbilical) or obesity surgery may be performed alone or in combination with abdominoplasty and panniculectomy. In addition, some surgeons perform these procedures at the same time as gynecological or pelvic procedures, such as hysterectomy. Although it has been proposed that performing abdominoplasty or panniculectomy in the same operative session as abdominal or gynecological surgeries may facilitate surgical access or promote postoperative wound healing and minimize the potential for wound complications, such as dehiscence or necrosis, there is insufficient evidence in the published, peer-reviewed scientific literature to support such assertions. Performing an abdominoplasty at the same operative session as abdominal operations (e.g., hernia repair, gastric bypass) or gynecological procedures is not essential for the successful clinical outcome of the abdominal or gynecological surgical procedure. In the absence of chronic and persistent skin conditions or interference with activities of daily living, abdominoplasty and panniculectomy are considered not medically necessary when performed in conjunction with abdominal or pelvic/gynecological surgeries to facilitate surgical access, to promote postoperative wound healing, or to minimize wound complications.

Suction-Assisted Lipectomy
Suction-assisted lipectomy of the abdominal area is a procedure in which excess fat deposits are removed from the trunk using a liposuction cannula with the goal of recontouring the body, thereby improving appearance. This procedure may be performed alone or as one component of the overall abdominoplasty or panniculectomy procedure. Suction-assisted lipectomy is considered cosmetic in nature when performed alone and not as part of a medically necessary panniculectomy,. When the procedure is performed as part of a medically necessary panniculectomy, suction-assisted lipectomy of the trunk is considered incidental to the primary procedure.

Abdominal Wall Laxity and Back Pain
No correlation has been established between the presence of abdominal wall laxity or redundant pannus and the development of neck or back pain. There is insufficient evidence in the published, peer-reviewed scientific literature to support the use of abdominoplasty and/or panniculectomy to treat neck or back pain, including pain in the cervical, thoracic, lumbar or lumbosacral regions. Abdominoplasty or panniculectomy is considered not medically necessary when performed for the sole purpose of treating neck or back pain.

Professional Societies/Organizations
According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) Practice Parameter for Abdominoplasty and Panniculectomy, the procedures are most commonly performed for cosmetic indications. However, there are reconstructive indications such as abdominal wall defects, irregularities or pain caused by previous pelvic or
lower abdominal surgery, umbilical hernias, intertriginous skin conditions and scarring (ASPS, 2007c). The ASPS recommended coverage criteria state that an abdominoplasty or panniculectomy should be considered a reconstructive procedure when performed to correct or relieve structural defects of the abdominal wall. When an abdominoplasty or panniculectomy is performed solely to enhance a patient's appearance in the absence of any signs or symptoms of functional abnormalities, the procedure should be considered cosmetic (ASPS, 2007a).

The ASPS Practice Parameter for Surgical Treatment of Skin Redundancy Following Massive Weight Loss states that "body contouring surgery is ideally performed after the patient maintains a stable weight for two to six months. For post bariatric surgery patients, this often occurs 12-18 months after surgery or at the 25 kg/mg2 to 30 kg/mg2 weight range" (ASPS, 2007d).

**Use Outside of the US**

No relevant information found.

### Coding/Billing Information

**Note:** 1) This list of codes may not be all-inclusive.

2) Deleted codes and codes which are not effective at the time the service is rendered may not be eligible for reimbursement.

**Panniculectomy**

**Considered Medically Necessary when criteria in the applicable policy statements listed above are met:**

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<tr>
<th>CPT® Codes</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15830</td>
<td>Excision, excessive skin and subcutaneous tissue (includes lipectomy); abdomen, infraumbilical panniculectomy</td>
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**Abdominoplasty**

**Considered Cosmetic/Not Medically Necessary:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CPT® Codes</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>15847</td>
<td>Excision, excessive skin and subcutaneous tissue (includes lipectomy), abdomen (eg, abdominoplasty) (includes umbilical transposition and fascial plication) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17999†</td>
<td>Unlisted procedure, skin, mucous membrane and subcutaneous tissue</td>
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*Note: Not Medically Necessary when used to report mini-abdominoplasty, with or without liposuction*

**Suction Assisted Lipectomy**

**Considered Cosmetic/Not Medically Necessary when performed alone and not as part of a medically necessary panniculectomy procedure:**

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<tr>
<th>CPT® Codes</th>
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<tr>
<td>15877</td>
<td>Suction assisted lipectomy; trunk</td>
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**References**


