
Medical Policy



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***Current Policy Effective Date: 3/1/25**
(See policy history boxes for previous effective dates)

Title: Abdominoplasty and Panniculectomy

Description/Background

Abdominoplasty, sometimes referred to as a “tummy tuck”, tightens a lax anterior abdominal wall, relocates the umbilicus, and excises excess skin and subcutaneous tissue elevated in the course of the abdominoplasty. Depending on the indications for the procedure, it may be considered reconstructive or cosmetic. Cosmetic surgery is performed to improve appearance and self-esteem. An example would be to improve the appearance of the abdominal wall by excision of loose or sagging skin that is a consequence of pregnancy but doesn’t pose any health issues or cause disability (e.g. uncontrolled intertrigo, back pain, walking difficulties).

Abdominoplasty may also be indicated for reconstruction of congenital defects, developmental abnormalities, trauma, infection, tumors or disease cause malformations of body structures and may result in health or functional issues. In this instance, surgery is generally performed to improve function, but it may also be done to restore an individual, as close as possible, to their previous appearance.

Panniculectomy consists of the excision of redundant, pendulous skin and subcutaneous tissue (“panniculus”) that is causing functional problems or symptoms (e.g., back pain, intertrigo, difficulty in ambulating). It may also be indicated to facilitate exposure and improve wound healing in conjunction with abdominal procedures such as hernia repair or pelvic surgery. It is a simpler procedure than abdominoplasty in that it does not include the cosmetic things done as part of an abdominoplasty.

As defined by the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons (2021):

- Reconstructive surgery is performed to treat body parts affected aesthetically or functionally by congenital defects, developmental abnormalities or trauma.

- Cosmetic surgery includes procedures that enhance and reshape normal structures of the body in order to improve one's appearance and self-esteem.

Per the Medicare Benefit Policy Manual cosmetic surgery or expenses incurred in connection with such surgery, for the sole purpose of improving one's appearance, is not covered. Massive weight loss can result in extensive redundancy of skin and adipose tissue folds in affected anatomic locations, resulting in functional difficulties. The abdominal and pelvic regions are most frequently involved, predisposing these areas to intertrigo, an inflammatory condition of skin folds caused by heat, moisture and friction which can give rise to various types of infections and/or impaired mobility.

Abdominoplasty with panniculectomy or panniculectomy alone are considered reconstructive when it is performed to correct or relieve structural defects of the abdominal wall and/or chronic low back pain due to functional incompetence of the anterior abdominal wall. These conditions may be caused by:

- Trauma or surgery to the anterior wall of the abdomen, resulting in loss of muscle or fascial integrity or pain from scar contracture
- Abdominal hernia
- Permanent over-stretching of the anterior abdominal wall following one or more pregnancies resulting in uncontrollable intertrigo and/or difficult ambulation
- Permanent over-stretching (with or without diastasis recti) of the anterior abdominal wall with a large or dependent abdominal panniculus, following intentional weight loss resulting in uncontrollable intertrigo and/or difficult ambulation.

Reconstructive panniculectomy and abdominoplasty are a major operations. Reconstructive abdominoplasty may include plication of the rectus muscles and sometimes the external oblique fascia. When indicated, specific hernia repairs (ventral hernia) may be performed at the same time. It should be noted that abdominoplasty is different from panniculectomy in that abdominoplasty involves tightening the muscles of the abdomen as well as removing excess skin and fat, whereas a panniculectomy removes only excess skin and fat.

Regulatory Status

N/A

Medical Policy Statement

The safety and effectiveness of abdominoplasty with or without associated panniculectomy has been established. It may be considered a useful therapeutic option if supporting documentation substantiates functional impairment and appropriate selection criteria are met.

The clinical utility of simple panniculectomy has been established. It may be considered a useful therapeutic option when appropriate selection criteria are met.

Inclusionary and Exclusionary Guidelines

Inclusions:

This procedure is considered reconstructive and not cosmetic if either Criteria A or Criteria B are met:

Criteria A:

Must meet **ALL** of the following requirements:

1. The individual has had a documented massive weight loss of at least 100 pounds or whose panniculus hangs below the level of the pubis as a result of bariatric surgery or dieting;
2. The panniculus is so large that it causes uncontrolled intertrigo (which is unresponsive to conservative therapy including topical drying agents, corticosteroids and appropriate antibiotics), skin ulceration, skin necrosis or chronic intractable low back pain;
3. Sufficient time has elapsed (a minimum of 6 months) so as to ensure maximum weight loss and weight stability.

Criteria B:

The surgery is performed on an abnormal structure of the body, caused by a congenital defect, developmental abnormality, trauma, infection or tumor and is accompanied by a functional impairment.

Exclusions:

Surgical repair of diastasis recti, a separation between the left and right side of the rectus abdominis muscle, is not a condition for which abdominoplasty would be indicated.

CPT/HCPCS Level II Codes *(Note: The inclusion of a code in this list is not a guarantee of coverage. Please refer to the medical policy statement to determine the status of a given procedure.)*

Established codes

15830 15847

Other codes (investigational, not medically necessary, etc.)

N/A

Note: Code(s) may not be covered by all contracts or certificates. Please consult customer or provider inquiry resources at BCBSM or BCN to verify coverage.

Rationale

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) Practice Parameter for Abdominoplasty and Panniculectomy, these procedures are most commonly performed for aesthetic reasons. However, there are reconstructive indications such as abdominal wall defects, complications secondary to a previous pelvic or lower abdominal surgery, umbilical hernias, intertriginous skin conditions and scarring sequelae. Additionally, the ASPS reports that deformities associated with massive weight loss can lead to negative feelings about one's appearance, an inability to exercise, impaired ambulation, difficulty with hygiene and skin necrosis.

Significant intentional weight loss is associated with reduced morbidity and mortality. However, excess skin as a consequence of weight loss represents a major problem, impacting upon an individual's functionality with potential negative effects. Smith et al (2018) published a retrospective study which indicated that individuals who have undergone body contouring after bariatric surgery are able to lose significantly more weight and maintain weight loss at 5 years of follow up compared to those undergoing bariatric surgery alone.

ElAbd et al (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis evaluating the long term effects of body contouring surgery on the magnitude and durability of weight loss after bariatric surgery. The mean follow-up time for cases and controls were 61.6 ± 23.8 months and 52.2 ± 23.8 months, respectively. Authors concluded that evidence supported the added long-term benefits of body contouring surgery for selected individuals after massive weight loss following bariatric surgery.

Herman et al (2010) performed a literature search to examine the clinical outcomes of post-bariatric individuals who underwent abdominal contouring surgery. Their findings suggested that these procedures, including contouring of the abdomen and circumferential midsection, are necessary adjuncts to massive weight loss in order to restore the individual to a more functional state with a higher quality of life. A vast majority of associated complications were related to wound healing and seromas, most often not requiring any further interventions. Further, it was noted that the benefits of post-bariatric contouring far outweighed the complications of the surgeries.

Government Regulations

National

There is no national coverage determination on this topic.

Local

Local Coverage Determination (LCD) for Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgery (L39051); Original effective date: 11/14/21; Revised: 10/13/24

Coverage Indications, Limitations, and/or Medical Necessity

According to the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, the specialty of plastic surgery includes reconstructive and cosmetic procedures:

- Reconstructive surgery is performed on abnormal structures of the body, caused by congenital defects, developmental abnormalities, trauma, infection, tumors, involutional defects, or disease. It is generally performed to improve function, may also be done to approximate a normal appearance, and may be covered as surgery is considered reconstructive in nature.
- Cosmetic surgery is performed to reshape normal structures of the body in order to improve the individuals appearance and self-esteem. Please refer to CMS IOM Publication 100-02, Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 16: Section 120 for detailed information.

Per the Medicare Benefit Policy Manual cosmetic surgery or expenses incurred in connection with such surgery, for the sole purpose of improving one's appearance, is not covered.

Indications for specific surgical procedure:

- Abdominal Lipectomy/Panniculectomy
 - The medical records document that the panniculus causes chronic intertrigo [dermatitis occurring on opposed surfaces of the skin, skin irritation, infection or chafing that consistently recurs or remains refractory to appropriate medical therapy (e.g., topical antifungals, corticosteroids, antibiotics)] over a period of 3 months.
 - Difficulty walking or functional impairment in activities of daily living due to pannus size, chronic pain, and/or ulceration created by the abdominal skin fold. Preoperative photographs may be required to support justification and should be supplied upon request.
 - This procedure may also be medically necessary for the individual who has had a significant weight-loss following the treatment of morbid obesity, in addition to meeting the criteria noted above, there should be evidence that the individual has maintained a stable weight for at least 6 months. If the weight loss is the result of bariatric surgery, abdominoplasty/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 6 months and infection and inflammation has continued for the most recent 3 months.

The following procedures are non-covered for the following indications:

- Cosmetic surgery performed to treat psychiatric or emotional problems is not covered.
- If a non-covered cosmetic surgery is performed in the same operative period as a covered surgical procedure, benefits will be provided for the covered surgical procedure only.
- Abdominal Lipectomy/Panniculectomy
 - Repairing abdominal wall laxity, or diastasis recti
 - Redundancies resulting from weight loss or weight loss surgery when that tissue is without evidence of chronic infection or inflammation that is refractory to conservative treatment as outlines in the indications listed above.
 - Solely to improve appearance
 - All other indications unless covered in the section above
- **Note:** Abdominal Lipectomy/Panniculectomy is considered experimental and investigational for minimizing the risk of hernia formation or recurrence. There is no evidence that pannus contributes to hernia formation. The primary cause of hernia formation is an abdominal wall defect or weakness, not a pulling effect from a large or redundant pannus.

Local Coverage Article - Billing and Coding: Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgery (A58774); Effective date: 11/14/21; Revision date: 10/1/24

Abdominal Lipectomy/Panniculectomy

The beneficiary's medical record must contain the following information:

- the evaluation and management supporting the medical necessity and/or complications with decision to perform surgery,
- surgical operative record,
- description of the pannus and the underlying skin,
- documentation that the panniculus causes chronic intertrigo (dermatitis occurring on opposed surfaces of the skin, skin irritation, infection or chafing),
- description of conservative treatment undertaken and its results,
- evidence that the individual has maintained a stable weight for at least 6 months.

(The above Medicare information is current as of the review date for this policy. However, the coverage issues and policies maintained by the Centers for Medicare & Medicare Services [CMS, formerly HCFA] are updated

Related Policies

- Bariatric Surgery
 - Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgery
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References

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3. American Society of Plastic Surgeons, "Practice Parameter for Abdominoplasty and Panniculectomy Unrelated to Obesity or Massive Weight Loss," 2007.
<http://www.plasticsurgery.org/Documents/medical-professionals/health-policy/evidence-practice/AbdominoplastyAndPanniculectomy.pdf>. Accessed October 1, 2024.
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8. Deitel, Mervyn, MD, "The Development of the Surgical Treatment of Morbid Obesity", *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 2002; 21(5):365-371.
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11. *HAYES Medical Technology Directory*, "Panniculectomy for Abdominal Contouring Following Massive Weight Loss," Lansdale, PA: HAYES, Inc., Publication date 9/19/12, last review date 8/26/14; archived 10/19/15.
12. *HAYES Medical Technology Directory*, "Panniculectomy for Treatment of Symptomatic Panniculi," Lansdale, PA: HAYES, Inc., May 19, 2016.
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14. Smith OJ, Hachach-Haram N, et al., "Body Contouring Surgery and the Maintenance of Weight-Loss Following Roux-Ex-Y Gastric Bypass: A Retrospective Study", *Aesthet Surg J*, 2018; 38(2):176-182.
15. Wisconsin Physicians Service, "Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgery," A58774. 2021. <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/view/article.aspx?articleid=58774&ver=11&keyword=Cosmetic+and+Reconstructive+Surgery&keywordType=starts&areald=s27&docType=NCA%2CCAL%2CNCD%2MEDCAC%2CTA%2CMCD%2C6%2C3%2C5%2C1%2CF%2CP&contractOption=all&sortBy=relevance&bc=1>. Accessed October 1, 2024.
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The articles reviewed in this research include those obtained in an Internet based literature search for relevant medical references through 10/1/24, the date the research was completed.

Joint BCBSM/BCN Medical Policy History

Policy Effective Date	BCBSM Signature Date	BCN Signature Date	Comments
3/21/02	3/21/02	3/21/02	Joint policy established
7/23/03	7/23/03	7/7/03	Routine maintenance
3/30/05	3/30/05	3/30/05	Routine maintenance
7/1/07	7/10/07	6/25/07	Routine maintenance
7/1/08	5/17/08	5/18/08	Routine maintenance
7/1/09	4/21/09	5/11/09	Routine maintenance
7/1/11	4/19/11	5/3/11	Routine maintenance; updated references and rationale sections
9/01/12	6/12/12	6/19/12	Routine maintenance; Medicare information updated
1/1/14	10/17/13	10/25/13	Routine maintenance
3/1/15	12/12/14	12/29/14	Routine maintenance
3/1/16	12/10/15	12/10/15	Routine maintenance
3/1/17	12/13/16	12/13/16	Routine maintenance
3/1/18	12/12/17	12/12/17	Routine maintenance
3/1/19	12/11/18		Routine maintenance
3/1/20	12/17/19		Routine maintenance
3/1/21	12/15/20		Routine maintenance
3/1/22	12/14/21		Routine maintenance LCD replaced
3/1/23	12/20/22		Routine maintenance (slp)
3/1/24	12/19/23		Routine maintenance (slp) Vendor Managed: N/A
3/1/25	12/17/24		Routine maintenance (slp) Vendor Managed: N/A Panniculectomy added to end of title

Next Review Date: 4th Qtr, 2025

Pre-Consolidation Medical Policy History

Original Policy Date	Comments
BCN: 11/23/99	Revised: 2/05/02
BCBSM: N/A	Revised: N/A

BLUE CARE NETWORK BENEFIT COVERAGE
POLICY: ABDOMINOPLASTY AND PANNICULECTOMY

I. Coverage Determination:

Commercial HMO (includes Self-Funded groups unless otherwise specified)	Covered, policy guidelines apply
BCNA (Medicare Advantage)	Refer to the Medicare information under the Government Regulations section of this policy.
BCN65 (Medicare Complementary)	Coinsurance covered if primary Medicare covers the service.

II. Administrative Guidelines:

- The member's contract must be active at the time the service is rendered.
- Coverage is based on each member's certificate and is not guaranteed. Please consult the individual member's certificate for details. Additional information regarding coverage or benefits may also be obtained through customer or provider inquiry services at BCN.
- The service must be authorized by the member's PCP except for Self-Referral Option (SRO) members seeking Tier 2 coverage.
- Services must be performed by a BCN-contracted provider, if available, except for Self-Referral Option (SRO) members seeking Tier 2 coverage.
- Payment is based on BCN payment rules, individual certificate and certificate riders.
- Appropriate copayments will apply. Refer to certificate and applicable riders for detailed information.
- CPT - HCPCS codes are used for descriptive purposes only and are not a guarantee of coverage.