

# Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP)

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Imaging (X-ray, MRI, CT scans) for low back pain is not typically associated with improved outcomes and can expose patients to unnecessary risk, such as radiation.<sup>i</sup> Although patients may have a perceived need for these studies, providers can educate patients on appropriate indications for imaging in order to avoid unnecessary or routine imaging.

## APPLICABLE LINES OF BUSINESS

- Commercial

## MEASURE DESCRIPTION

Percentage of members with a primary diagnosis of low back pain who did not have an imaging study (plain X-ray, MRI, CT scan) within 28 days of the diagnosis.<sup>ii</sup>

Note: A higher rate indicates appropriate treatment of LBP (such as the proportion of patients for which imaging studies did not occur).

## EXCLUSIONS

Exclude members with:

- Previous diagnosis of low back pain (within last six months)
- History of Cancer
- Recent trauma within last 3 months
- History of intravenous drug abuse within last 12 months
- Neurologic impairment any time during last 12 months
- History of HIV
- Spinal infection any time during last 12 months
- History of Major organ transplant
- Prolonged use of corticosteroids (90 consecutive days) in the past 12 months
- History of being in hospice at any time in the measurement year

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

### Educate patients about ways to treat symptoms and prevent reinjury:

- Avoid bed rest, lifting heavy objects, twisting, and bending
- Remain as active as possible within pain limits and return to normal activities as soon as possible
- Use nonsteroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs and/or acetaminophen
- Avoid opioids to treat common low back pain. Opioids are specifically excluded for use in the treatment of common low back pain in clinical guidelines. Visit the Own Your Health WA website to learn more at [www.ownyourhealthwa.org](http://www.ownyourhealthwa.org).<sup>iii</sup>

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i Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain. In: NCQA. <https://www.ncqa.org/hedis/measures/use-of-imaging-studies-for-low-back-pain>  
ii National Committee for Quality Assurance. HEDIS® 2020 Volume 2 Technical Specifications for Health Plans (2019), 340-344  
iii Noninvasive Treatments for Acute, Subacute, and Chronic Low Back Pain: A Clinical Practice Guideline From the American College of Physicians:  
<http://annals.org/aim/article/2603228/noninvasivetreatments-acute-subacute-chronic-low-back-pain-clinical-practice>