

Medical Coverage Policy | Sympathetic Therapy for the Treatment of Pain



EFFECTIVE DATE: 10|01|2001

POLICY LAST UPDATED: 10|08|2021

OVERVIEW

Sympathetic therapy describes a type of electrical stimulation of the peripheral nerves that is designed to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system in an effort to “normalize” the autonomic nervous system and alleviate chronic pain.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not applicable

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Not applicable

POLICY STATEMENT

Medicare Advantage Plans

Sympathetic therapy for the treatment of pain is not covered as the evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

Commercial Products

Sympathetic therapy for the treatment of pain is not medically necessary as the evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups and contracts. Please refer to the appropriate section of the Benefit Booklet, Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable not medically necessary/not covered benefits/coverage.

BACKGROUND

Sympathetic therapy uses 4 intersecting channels of various frequencies with bilateral electrode placement on the feet, legs, arms, and hands. Based on the location of the patient’s pain and treatment protocols supplied by the manufacturer, electrodes are placed in various locations on the lower legs and feet or the hands and arms. Electrical current is then induced with beat frequencies between 0 and 1000 Hz. Treatment may include daily 1-hour treatments in the physician’s office, followed by home treatments, if the initial treatment is effective.

Unlike transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) or interferential electrical stimulation, sympathetic therapy is not designed to treat local pain, but is designed to induce a systemic effect on sympathetically induced pain.

Currently, there are no studies published in the peer-reviewed literature regarding sympathetic therapy, therefore there is no evidence to support its efficacy and the service is considered not medically necessary.

CODING

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

There is no specific CPT or HCPCS code for sympathetic therapy for the treatment of pain, therefore providers should report this service with an unlisted procedure code.

If the following CPT codes are used to report sympathetic therapy, they will be not covered for Medicare Advantage Plans and not medically necessary for Commercial Products:

97014 Application of a modality to one or more areas; electrical stimulation (unattended)

97032 Application of a modality to one or more areas; electrical stimulation (manual), each 15 minutes

RELATED POLICIES

Not applicable

PUBLISHED

Provider Update, December 2021

Provider Update, June 2020

Provider Update, June 2019

Provider Update, May 2018

Provider Update, May 2017

REFERENCES

1. www.chronicpainrx.com
2. Guido EH. Effects of sympathetic therapy on chronic pain in peripheral neuropathy subjects. *Am J Pain Manage* 2002; 12 (1):31-4.
3. Work Loss Data Institute. *Pain 2006*; National Guideline Clearinghouse, www.guideline.gov

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