

## Medical Coverage Policy | Lysis of Epidural Adhesions



**EFFECTIVE DATE:** 03|05|2015  
**POLICY LAST UPDATED:** 11|07|2017

### Overview

Lysis of epidural adhesions, also called the Racz procedure, involves passage of a catheter (Racz catheter) endoscopically or percutaneously under fluoroscopic guidance into the epidural space under general anesthetic or conscious sedation. Various protocols for breaking up adhesions and reducing pain and inflammation have been described.

### MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not applicable.

### PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Prior authorization is not required.

### POLICY STATEMENT

#### BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial

Catheter-based techniques for lysis of epidural adhesions, with or without endoscopic guidance, are considered not medically necessary as there is insufficient peer-reviewed scientific literature that demonstrates that the procedure/service is effective.

### COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups/contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable “not medically necessary services” benefits/coverage.

### BACKGROUND

Various protocols for breaking up adhesions and reducing pain and inflammation have been described. The catheter may then be manipulated to mechanically break up adhesions, and various agents that may include anesthetics, corticosteroids, hyaluronidase, and hypertonic saline, are injected. In some early protocols, the catheter was left in place and injections repeated over several days.

Epidural fibrosis with or without adhesive arachnoiditis most commonly occurs as a complication of spinal surgery and may be included under the diagnosis of “failed back surgery syndrome.” Both result from manipulation of the supporting structures of the spine. Epidural fibrosis can occur in isolation, but adhesive arachnoiditis is rarely present without associated epidural fibrosis. Arachnoiditis is most frequently seen in patients who have undergone multiple surgical procedures.

Both conditions are related to inflammatory reactions that result in the entrapment of nerves within dense scar tissue, increasing the susceptibility of the nerve root to compression or tension. The condition most frequently involves the nerves within the lumbar spine and cauda equina. Signs and symptoms indicate the involvement of multiple nerve roots and include low back pain, radicular pain, tenderness, sphincter disturbances, limited trunk mobility, muscular spasm or contracture, and motor sensory and reflex changes. Typically, the pain is characterized as constant and burning. In some cases, the pain and disability are severe, leading to analgesic dependence and chronic invalidism.

Lysis of epidural adhesions, using fluoroscopic guidance, with epidural injections of hypertonic saline in conjunction with corticosteroids and analgesics, has been investigated as a treatment option. Theoretically, the use of hypertonic saline results in a mechanical disruption of the adhesions. It may also function to reduce edema within previously scarred and/or inflamed nerves. Finally, manipulating the catheter at the time of the injection may disrupt adhesions. Spinal endoscopy has been used to guide the lysis procedure, but the procedure is more commonly performed percutaneously using epidurography to guide catheter placement and identify nonfilling adhesions that indicate epidural scarring. Using endoscopy guidance, a flexible fiberoptic catheter is inserted into the sacral hiatus, providing 3-D visualization to steer the catheter toward the adhesions, to more precisely place the injectate in the epidural space and onto the nerve root. Various protocols for lysis have been described; in some situations, the catheter may remain in place for several days for serial treatment sessions.

Endoscopic epidurolysis is also being investigated for the treatment of degenerative chronic low back pain, including spondylolisthesis, stenosis, and hernia associated with radiculopathy. Along with mechanical adhesiolysis, hyaluronidase, ciprofloxacin, and ozone have been applied.

Lysis of epidural adhesions involves passage of a catheter endoscopically or percutaneously under fluoroscopic guidance into the epidural space to break up adhesions and reduce pain and inflammation. The evidence for lysis of epidural adhesions with or without endoscopy is limited to a small number of randomized, controlled trials with methodological weaknesses, nearly all from the same center. This evidence is insufficient to establish the safety and effectiveness of epidural lysis in comparison with placebo and alternative procedures. Larger, high-quality, controlled studies from other research groups are needed to corroborate the currently available trials. Thus, lysis of epidural adhesions is considered not medically necessary as there is no proven efficacy.

#### **CODING**

##### **BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial**

The following codes are considered not medically necessary:

- 62263** Percutaneous lysis of epidural adhesions using solution injection (eg, hypertonic saline, enzyme) or mechanical means (eg, catheter) including radiologic localization (includes contrast when administered), multiple adhesiolysis sessions; 2 or more days
- 62264** Percutaneous lysis of epidural adhesions using solution injection (eg, hypertonic saline, enzyme) or mechanical means (eg, catheter) including radiologic localization (includes contrast when administered), multiple adhesiolysis sessions; 1 day

To report endoscopic lysis of epidural adhesions, use the following unlisted CPT code:

**64999**, Unlisted procedure, nervous system

#### **RELATED POLICIES**

Not applicable.

#### **PUBLISHED**

Provider Update, December 2017

Provider Update, January 2017

Provider Update, May 2015

Provider Update, September 2013

Provider Update, October 2012

Provider Update, September 2011

Provider Update, December 2010

Provider Update, October 2009

Provider Update, October 2008

## REFERENCES

1. Chopra P, Smith HS, Deer TR et al. Role of adhesiolysis in the management of chronic spinal pain: a systematic review of effectiveness and complications. *Pain Physician* 2005; 8(1):87-100.
2. Trescot AM, Chopra P, Abdi S et al. Systematic review of effectiveness and complications of adhesiolysis in the management of chronic spinal pain: an update. *Pain Physician* 2007; 10(1):129-46.
3. Helm Li S, Benyamin RM, Chopra P et al. Percutaneous adhesiolysis in the management of chronic low back pain in post lumbar surgery syndrome and spinal stenosis: a systematic review. *Pain Physician* 2012; 15(4):E435-62.
4. Racz GB, Heavner JE, Trescot A. Percutaneous lysis of epidural adhesions--evidence for safety and efficacy. *Pain Pract* 2008; 8(4):277-86.
5. Hayek SM, Helm S, Benyamin RM et al. Effectiveness of spinal endoscopic adhesiolysis in post lumbar surgery syndrome: a systematic review. *Pain Physician* 2009; 12(2):419-35.
6. Epter RS, Helm S, 2nd, Hayek SM et al. Systematic review of percutaneous adhesiolysis and management of chronic low back pain in post lumbar surgery syndrome. *Pain Physician* 2009; 12(2):361-78.
7. Heavner JE, Racz GB, Raj P. Percutaneous epidural neuroplasty: prospective evaluation of 0.9% NaCl versus 10% NaCl with or without hyaluronidase. *Reg Anesth Pain Med* 1999; 24(3):202-7.
8. Wagner KJ, Sprenger T, Pecho C et al. [Risks and complications of epidural neurolysis -- a review with case report]. *Anesthesiol Intensivmed Notfallmed Schmerzther* 2006; 41(4):213-22.
9. Helm S, Hayek SM, Colson J et al. Spinal endoscopic adhesiolysis in post lumbar surgery syndrome: an update of assessment of the evidence. *Pain Physician* 2013; 16(2 Suppl):SE125-50.
10. Gerdesmeyer L, Wagenpfeil S, Birkenmaier C et al. Percutaneous epidural lysis of adhesions in chronic lumbar radicular pain: a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *Pain Physician* 2013; 16(3):185-96.
11. Manchikanti L, Singh V, Cash KA et al. Assessment of effectiveness of percutaneous adhesiolysis and caudal epidural injections in managing post lumbar surgery syndrome: 2-year follow-up of a randomized, controlled trial. *J Pain Res* 2012; :597-608.
12. Manchikanti L, Abdi S, Atluri S et al. An update of comprehensive evidence-based guidelines for interventional techniques in chronic spinal pain. Part II: guidance and recommendations. *Pain Physician* 2013; 16(2 Suppl):S49-283.

[CLICK THE ENVELOPE ICON BELOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS](#)

This medical policy is made available to you for informational purposes only. It is not a guarantee of payment or a substitute for your medical judgment in the treatment of your patients. Benefits and eligibility are determined by the member's subscriber agreement or member certificate and/or the employer agreement, and those documents will supersede the provisions of this medical policy. For information on member-specific benefits, call the provider call center. If you provide services to a member which are determined to not be medically necessary (or in some cases medically necessary services which are non-covered benefits), you may not charge the member for the services unless you have informed the member and they have agreed in writing in advance to continue with the treatment at their own expense. Please refer to your participation agreement(s) for the applicable provisions. This policy is current at the time of publication; however, medical practices, technology, and knowledge are constantly changing. BCBSRI reserves the right to review and revise this policy for any reason and at any time, with or without notice. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

