

Medical Coverage Policies

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Measurement of Long Chain Omega-3 Fatty Acids in Red Blood Cell Membranes

EFFECTIVE DATE	08/18/2009	LAST UPDATED	10/05/2010
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Description:

Epidemiologic studies have reported that subjects who eat a diet high in fish have a reduced risk of sudden cardiac death. Fish are rich in long-chain omega-3 fatty acids, and it has been hypothesized that these fatty acids may be responsible for the beneficial effect. Long-chain omega-3 fatty acids may be detected in the red cell membrane using gas chromatography. It has been suggested this measurement may be clinically useful as a cardiac risk factor for sudden cardiac death.

A search of the literature identified many observational studies exploring the relationship between fish consumption and coronary heart disease mortality in different populations of patients. Yet research did not identify any published articles that explored how the measurement of red blood cell membrane omega-3 fatty acids may be used to improve patient management.

Medical Criteria:

Not applicable.

Policy:

Measurement of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids in red blood cell membranes, including but not limited to its use as a cardiac risk factor, is considered not medically necessary as there is insufficient peer-reviewed scientific literature that demonstrates its effectiveness.

Coverage:

Benefits may vary between groups/contracts. Please refer to the appropriate evidence of coverage, subscriber agreements, or BlueCHIP for Rlte Care contract for applicable "Not Medically Necessary Services."

Coding:

The following Category III codes is considered not medically necessary:

0111T

Publications:

Provider Update, October 2009

References:

Blue Cross Association: 2.04.40 Measurement of Long-Chain Omega-3 Fatty Acids in Red Blood Cell Membranes as a Cardiac Risk Factor. Reviewed with literature search/March 2008. Retrieved 9/3/10 :http://bluweb.bcbs.com/global_assets/special_content/medical_policy/policymanual/policy.html?pnum=20440.

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