

## Low Back Pain Imaging Tips

Are you thinking of ordering an image for low back pain within 28 days of the first visit for a patient's episode of care?

### Alternative options to early imaging?

- » **Education:** including limitations of imaging and risk of unnecessary medical intervention; educate on pain relief, stretching, and proper body mechanics
- » **Early Physical Therapy:** Physical therapy within 14 days of initial visit for low back pain
- » **Medication:** NSAIDs and/or Acetaminophen are the meds of choice
- » **Holistic Care:** Whole person assessment and early use of other pain mitigating specialists

### Is there a low back pain "**Red Flag**"? **YES, if:**

- » **Cancer, infection, or major organ transplant:** History of cancer, unexplained weight loss, Immunosuppression, HIV, IV drug abuse, spinal infection, urinary infection, major organ transplant, prolonged use of corticosteroids; back pain not improved with conservative management
- » **Recent trauma:** History of significant trauma, minor fall or heavy lift in a potentially osteoporotic or elderly individual. Trauma codes beginning with "S" include injury of abdominal organs, open wounds to abdomen, lower back, pelvis, and thorax, skull fracture and open head wounds
- » **Cauda equina syndrome:** per NCQA 2017 guidelines, Cauda equina is the neurologic impairment allowed as of 31 January 2017
- » Exclude ED visits and observation visits that result in an inpatient admission

Access to full guideline and toolkit:  
<http://www.healthquality.va.gov> or,  
<https://www.qmo.amedd.army.mil>



## Low Back Pain Imaging Tips

**DO NOT code for Low Back Pain as it is a symptom not a diagnosis. If the pain is due to trauma/injury use the code for the trauma/injury.**

**Example 1** Patient fell from a ladder and landed on his back while putting up Christmas decorations outside his home. Chief complaint is low back pain. Upon exam there is no visible bruising, only tenderness, and imaging reveal no fracture

### DO NOT CODE LOW BACK PAIN, code the injury

S3992XA	Unspecified injury of lower back, initial encounter
W11XXA	Fall on and from ladder, initial encounter
Y93H9	Activity, other involving exterior property and land maintenance, building and construction
Y92017	Garden or yard in single family (private) house as the place of occurrence.

**Example 2** Patient presents to PCM for acute low back pain. Provider determines it is a flare up of patients Degenerative Disk Disease (DDD).

M5136	DDD Lumbar
M5137	DDD Lumbosacral

**Example 3** Patient presents to ED for low back pain and dysuria. After labs and UA, no confirmation of UTI is made. Provider has to code the back pain, M545, however the code for Dysuria can be coded as the primary diagnosis code.

DDD Lumbar