Medical Policy
Percutaneous Intradiscal Electrothermal Annuloplasty, Radiofrequency Annuloplasty, and Biacuplasty

Table of Contents
- Policy: Commercial
- Policy: Medicare
- Authorization Information
- Coding Information
- Description
- Policy History
- Information Pertaining to All Policies
- References

Policy Number: 482
BCBSA Reference Number: 7.01.72
NCD/LCD: National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Thermal Intradiscal Procedures (TIPs) (150.11)

Related Policies
- Automated Percutaneous and Percutaneous Endoscopic Discectomy, #231
- Decompression of the Intervertebral Disc Using Laser Energy (Laser Discectomy) or Radiofrequency Coblation (Nucleoplasty), #271

Policy
Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, and Indemnity

Percutaneous annuloplasty (e.g., intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty, intradiscal radiofrequency annuloplasty, or intradiscal biacuplasty) for the treatment of chronic discogenic back pain is considered INVESTIGATIONAL.

Medicare HMO BlueSM and Medicare PPO BlueSM Members

Medical necessity criteria and coding guidance can be found through the link below.

National Coverage Determinations (NCDs)

National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Thermal Intradiscal Procedures (TIPs) (150.11)

Note: To review the specific NCD, please remember to click “accept” on the CMS licensing agreement at the bottom of the CMS webpage.

Prior Authorization Information
Inpatient
- For services described in this policy, precertification/preauthorization IS REQUIRED for all products if the procedure is performed inpatient.

Outpatient
• For services described in this policy, see below for products where prior authorization might be required if the procedure is performed outpatient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Description</th>
<th>Outpatient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Managed Care (HMO and POS)</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial PPO and Indemnity</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicare HMO BlueSM</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicare PPO BlueSM</td>
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CPT Codes / HCPCS Codes / ICD Codes
Inclusion or exclusion of a code does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement. Please refer to the member’s contract benefits in effect at the time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage as it applies to an individual member.

Providers should report all services using the most up-to-date industry-standard procedure, revenue, and diagnosis codes, including modifiers where applicable.

The following codes are included below for informational purposes only; this is not an all-inclusive list.

The following CPT and HCPCS codes are considered investigational for Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, Indemnity, Medicare HMO Blue and Medicare PPO Blue:

CPT Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPT codes</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22526</td>
<td>Percutaneous intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty, unilateral or bilateral including fluoroscopic guidance; single level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22527</td>
<td>Percutaneous intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty, unilateral or bilateral including fluoroscopic guidance; 1 or more additional level</td>
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HCPCS Codes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>HCPCS codes</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>S2348</td>
<td>Decompression procedure, percutaneous, of nucleus pulposus of intervertebral disc, using radiofrequency energy, single or multiple levels, lumbar</td>
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Description
Discogenic Low Back Pain
Discogenic low back pain is a common, multifactorial pain syndrome that involves low back pain without radicular symptoms findings, in conjunction with radiologically confirmed degenerative disc disease.

Treatment
Typical treatment includes conservative therapy with physical therapy and medication management, with potential for surgical decompression in more severe cases.

A number of electrothermal intradiscal procedures have been introduced to treat discogenic low back pain; they rely on various probe designs to introduce radiofrequency (RF) energy into the disc. It has been proposed that heat-induced denaturation of collagen fibers in the annular lamellae may stabilize the disc and potentially seal annular fissures and that pain reduction may occur through the thermal coagulation of nociceptors in the outer annulus.

Some electrothermal intradiscal procedures are briefly described next.
With the intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty procedure, a navigable catheter with an embedded thermal resistive coil is inserted posterolaterally into the disc annulus or nucleus. Using indirect RF energy, electrothermal heat is generated within the thermal resistive coil at a temperature of 90°C; the disc material is heated for up to 20 minutes. Proposed advantages of indirect electrothermal delivery of RF energy with intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty include precise temperature feedback and control, and the ability to provide electrothermocoagulation to a broader tissue segment than would be allowed with a direct RF needle.

Percutaneous intradiscal radiofrequency thermocoagulation uses direct application of RF energy. With percutaneous intradiscal radiofrequency thermocoagulation, the RF probe is placed into the center of the disc, and the device is activated for only 90 seconds at a temperature of 70°C. The procedure is not designed to coagulate, burn, or ablate tissue. The Radionics RF Disc Catheter System has been specifically designed for this purpose.

Intradiscal biacuplasty uses 2 cooled RF electrodes placed on the posterolateral sides of the intervertebral annulus fibrosus. It is believed that, by cooling the probes, a larger area may be treated than could occur with a regular needle probe.

Annuloplasty using a laser-assisted spinal endoscopy kit to coagulate the disc granulation tissue (percutaneous endoscopic laser annuloplasty) has also been described.

**Summary**

Electrothermal intradiscal annuloplasty therapies use radiofrequency energy sources to treat discogenic low back pain arising from annular tears. These annuloplasty techniques are designed to decrease pain arising from the annulus by thermocoagulating nerves in the disc and tightening of annular tissue.

For individuals who have discogenic back pain who receive intradiscal thermal annuloplasty, radiofrequency annuloplasty, or biacuplasty, the evidence includes a small number of randomized controlled trials. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, functional outcomes, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. Two randomized controlled trials on intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty have reported conflicting results, with one reporting benefit for intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty and the other reporting no benefit. There is a lack of evidence to support a role for radiofrequency annuloplasty with either a single or a double (biacuplasty) probe. One sham-controlled randomized controlled trials assessing biacuplasty has suggested that this procedure may provide modest benefit to highly select patients; confirmation of these results in a broader population is needed. Further study in a sham-controlled trial with a representative population of patients is needed. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

**Policy History**

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<tr>
<td>2/2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/2017</td>
<td>BCBSA National medical policy review. Title changed. Policy statement terminology revised to reflect the changes in the title but the intent is unchanged. New references added. 3/1/2017.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/2015</td>
<td>Added coding language.</td>
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<td>8/2015</td>
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**Information Pertaining to All Blue Cross Blue Shield Medical Policies**

Click on any of the following terms to access the relevant information:
- [Medical Policy Terms of Use](#)
- [Managed Care Guidelines](#)
- [Indemnity/PPO Guidelines](#)
- [Clinical Exception Process](#)
- [Medical Technology Assessment Guidelines](#)

**References**

1. Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association Technology Evaluation Center (TEC). Intradiscal electrothermal therapy for chronic low back pain. TEC Assessments Apr 2002;Volume 17:Tab 11. PMID 11010675