

Risk Adjustment Coding Academy- Coding Focus

Factors Influencing Health Status: Amputations



Amputation is a surgical procedure to remove a limb (e.g., leg or arm) or a part of a limb (e.g., toe or finger), caused by injury, disease, or infection. According to WebMD, approximately 1.8 million Americans have an amputation. The most common amputation surgery is of the leg, which can be either above or below the knee.¹

Reasons for Amputation

There are many reasons why a physician may perform an amputation. The most common reason is poor circulation caused by damage or narrowing of the arteries, a condition known as peripheral arterial disease. Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) most commonly occurs in persons between the ages of 50 to 75 years, and is typically a result of diabetes or atherosclerosis. Due to the decreased blood flow, the body's cells cannot get oxygen and nutrients needed from the bloodstream. As a result, the affected tissue begins to die leading to an infection.

Other causes for amputation may include:

- Severe injury from a vehicle accident or serious burn

- Cancerous tumor in the bone or muscle of the limb
- Serious infection that does not get better with antibiotics or other treatment
- Neuroma- thickening of nerve tissue
- Severe frostbite

Risks of Amputation

Patients with diabetes, heart disease, and/or those who suffer from serious infection have a higher risk of complication from an amputation. The site of the amputation can also be a factor as above knee amputations are considered to be higher risk than below knee.

Other potential complications of an amputation include:

- Deformity of the joint
- Surgical site Infections
- Hematoma
- Blood clots in the veins of the limb or in the lung
- Necrosis (tissue death)

Long-Term Care

There have been many advances over the past several years in the surgical techniques performed, postoperative rehabilitation, and prosthetic design and development. Proper healing and fitting of the artificial limb help to reduce the risk of long-term medical complications. An amputation requires a process of adaptation that can be helped with physical therapy. If the amputation was the result of PAD, continued steps will need to be taken to prevent the condition so that it does not affect other parts of the body.

Status Coding Guidance

According to AHA Coding Clinic Volume 4, Limb Status Code - Guidelines "These codes are to be used to identify persons who are missing limbs due to trauma or surgical amputation and no current disease or residual exists at the amputation site."² Status codes are designated as secondary, and should not be assigned as a primary diagnosis.

In ICD-9, lower limb amputation status codes (V49.7-) (HCC 189) only allow for specification of the level of amputation (e.g., hip, below or above knee, ankle, foot, great toe, or other toe).³ In ICD-10, lower limb status codes (Z89.---) (HCC 189) specify not only the level of amputation, but also laterality (right or left).⁴ Status conditions such as amputations need to be reported on an annual basis for risk adjustment purposes.

1. WebMD website: "Limb Amputation: Reasons, Procedure, Recovery" (accessed July 2016): webmd.com

2. AHA Coding Clinic, Fourth Issue, 1994, "Limb Status Codes – Guidelines"

3. Hart, A. C., Stegman, M. S., & Ford, B. (2011). ICD-9-CM for physicians, volumes 1 & 2: 2012 professional: International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, Clinical Modification. Eden Prairie, MN: OptumInsight.

4. Anita Schmidt, K.K., & P.W. (2016). ICD-10-CM Expert for Physicians. Optum360