



CLINICAL MEDICAL POLICY	
<b>Policy Name:</b>	Panniculectomy/Abdominoplasty/Lipectomy
<b>Policy Number:</b>	MP-041-MD-PA
<b>Responsible Department(s):</b>	Medical Management
<b>Provider Notice/Issue Date:</b>	02/01/2023; 03/01/2022; 02/13/2021; 02/17/2020; 03/18/2019; 05/01/2018
<b>Effective Date:</b>	03/01/2023; 04/01/2022; 03/15/2021; 03/16/2020; 03/18/2019; 05/01/2018; 05/01/2017
<b>Next Annual Review:</b>	12/2023
<b>Revision Date:</b>	12/21/2022; 12/15/2021; 12/16/2020; 12/18/2019; 12/19/2018; 12/20/2017; 08/09/2017
<b>Products:</b>	Highmark Wholecare <sup>SM</sup> Medicaid
<b>Application:</b>	All participating hospitals and providers
<b>Page Number(s):</b>	1 of 9

#### Policy History

Date	Activity
03/01/2023	Provider Effective date
01/12/2023	PARP Approval
12/21/2022	QI/UM Committee review
12/21/2022	Annual Review: No changes to clinical criteria. Minor wording changes in 'Procedures' section. Replaced 'noncovered' with 'not medically necessary'.
04/01/2022	Provider Effective date
02/07/2022	PARP Approval
12/15/2021	QI/UM Committee review
12/15/2021	Annual Review: No changes to clinical criteria. Minor formatting changes made to Procedures section. Updated Summary of Literature and Reference Sources sections.
03/15/2021	Provider Effective Date
02/01/2021	PARP Approval
12/16/2020	QI/UM Committee Review
12/16/2020	Annual Review: Revision of medical necessity statement. Updated Summary of Literature and References.
03/16/2020	Provider Effective Date
02/06/2020	PARP Approval
12/18/2019	QI/UM Committee Review
12/18/2019	Annual Review: No changes; added reference
03/18/2019	Provider Effective Date

## **Disclaimer**

Highmark Wholecare<sup>SM</sup> medical policy is intended to serve only as a general reference resource regarding coverage for the services described. This policy does not constitute medical advice and is not intended to govern or otherwise influence medical decisions.

## **Policy Statement**

Highmark Wholecare<sup>SM</sup> may provide coverage under the medical-surgical benefits of the Company's Medicaid products for medically necessary panniculectomy surgical procedures. This policy excludes the coverage of abdominoplasty and lipectomy surgical procedures, due to the procedures being cosmetic in nature.

This policy is designed to address the medical necessity guidelines that are appropriate for the majority of individuals with a particular disease, illness or condition. Each person's unique clinical circumstances warrant individual consideration, based upon review of applicable medical records.

(Current applicable Pennsylvania HealthChoices Agreement Section V. Program Requirements, B. Prior Authorization of Services, 1. General Prior Authorization Requirements.)

## **Definitions**

**Prior Authorization Review Panel (PARP)** – A panel of representatives from within the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services who have been assigned organizational responsibility for the review, approval, and denial of all PH-MCO Prior Authorization policies and procedures.

**Panniculus** – The subcutaneous fat or a layer of fat underlying the dermis (also referred to as pannus, fat apron, or abdominal apron). The layer of fat and dermis hangs from the front of the abdomen.

**Panniculectomy** – The surgical excision to remove a panniculus.

**Lipectomy** – The excision of subcutaneous adipose tissue which may be performed on various parts of the body (also referred to as belt lipectomy, liposuction, brachioplasty, buttock or thigh lift, and body lift).

**Abdominoplasty** – The removal of excess skin and fat from the pubis to the umbilicus region or above; may also include the tightening of the rectus muscle (also referred to as "tummy tuck"). The abdominoplasty is typically performed for cosmetic purposes (ASPS, 2007).

**Massive Weight Loss (MWL)** – Loss of 50% of excess weight.

**Functional Impairment** – A condition that describes a state where an individual is physically limited in the performance of activities of daily living (ADL).

**Intertrigo** – An inflammation of the top layers of skin caused by moisture, bacteria, or fungi in the folds of the skin.

**Colostomy** – The surgical creation of an opening in the abdominal wall (belly). The end of the colon is brought through this opening to form a stoma. Colostomies are performed for many different diseases and problems.

**Ventral Hernia** – A bulge or tear in the abdominal wall, resulting from weakened fascia or muscles, which allows the inner lining of the abdomen and/or intestinal loop to extend through the abdominal wall.

**Incisional Hernia** – The most common ventral hernia. If the ventral hernia occurs along an area of a previous surgical incision, it is referred to as an incisional hernia.

**“True” Hernia Repair** – Involves opening fascia and/or dissection of a hernia sac with return of intraperitoneal contents back to the peritoneal cavity. A “true” hernia repair should not be confused with diastasis recti repair, which is the repair to the separation of the rectus abdominis muscles.

## **Procedures**

1. Panniculectomy surgery may be considered medically necessary when ALL of the following conditions are met:
  - A. The patient must be 18 years of age or older; AND
  - B. The panniculus must be a Grade II or above in size (*see Informational section below*); AND
  - C. The patient must currently have a functional impairment; AND
  - D. The patient’s panniculus must exhibit recurrent or chronic episodes of a skin condition (i.e., cellulitis, ulcerations, lymphedema/lymphangitis or skin abscesses); AND
  - E. The patient must be unresponsive to ANY of the following appropriate medical management:
    - 1) Intravenous (IV) antibiotic treatments; OR
    - 2) Oral antibiotic treatments; OR
    - 3) Good hygiene practices (e.g., bathing and washing daily, keeping skin dry and clean, wearing clean clothing); OR
    - 4) Wound care (occurring under or around the panniculus) including topical antifungals and topical and/or systemic corticosteroids; OR
    - 5) Surgical drainage; AND
  - F. The patient must maintain adequate nutrition; AND
  - G. There must be documented massive weight loss (MWL), demonstrated by ANY ONE of the following:
    - 1) A patient that goes through natural MWL must have maintained a stable weight for a minimum of 6 months after the weight loss; OR
    - 2) A patient that goes through MWL resulting from bariatric surgery must wait at least 18 months after surgery and maintain a stable weight for a minimum of 6 months, totaling 24 months or 2 years.
2. Medical records must be provided to support the evaluation and treatment of the condition of the panniculus. The required documentation should include ALL of the following:
  - A. PCP records comprising of a History & Physical and medication list; AND

- B. Photographs (including front, side, and undersurface views); AND/OR
  - C. Pathology reports/operative reports (i.e., bariatric surgery, other obesity surgery, abdominoplasty, lipectomy, or any other surgery relevant to the region of the body where the panniculus is located); AND
  - D. Consultation reports (i.e., dermatologist, infectious disease, wound care clinic, home care notes, and surgeon).
3. Highmark Wholecare<sup>SM</sup> may consider the panniculectomy to be medically necessary when performed in conjunction with a colostomy or stomaplasty, to prevent distention of the colostomy in specific cases.
4. Highmark Wholecare<sup>SM</sup> may consider panniculectomy surgery a medically necessary service when performed in conjunction with a “true” ventral hernia repair, and the medical necessity criteria listed above is met. The panniculus must be a grade IV or more (*see Informational section below*). The following documentation is required for a ventral hernia:
- Size of the ventral hernia
  - Ventral hernia is not manually reducible
  - Ventral hernia is nonrecurring
  - Imaging (CT) or exam confirming the presence of the ventral hernia
  - Symptoms associated with hernia (e.g., pain)
5. Relative risks for panniculectomy
- Following MWL the patient has significant skin deterioration with marked weakening of the epidermis.
  - Plastic surgery addiction and patients suffering from body dysmorphia are not good candidates for a panniculectomy.
  - Failure to cease tobacco use before surgery due to the increased risk of skin necrosis and wound breakdown.
6. When the panniculectomy is not considered medically necessary
- For conditions other than those listed above, scientific evidence of medical necessity has not been established. Examples of not medically necessary indications for panniculectomy include, but are not limited to:
- No history of MWL through natural occurrence or bariatric surgery
  - To improve physical appearance
  - For the treatment of psychological or psychosocial symptoms or complaints
  - For the treatment of neck and/or back pain, there is no evidence that reduction of redundant skin and tissue results in less spinal stress or improved posture alignment. The patient’s neck and/or back pain should be treated with appropriate physical therapy modalities.
  - Panniculectomy surgery is not considered medically necessary when performed in conjunction with:
    - Abdominal or gynecologic procedures (e.g., C-section, hysterectomy, and obesity surgery)
    - Repair of abdominal wall laxity or diastasis resection
  - Lipectomy surgery (CPT code 15877) is considered cosmetic and therefore not medically necessary.

- Abdominoplasty surgery (CPT code 15847) is considered cosmetic and therefore not medically necessary.
- Panniculectomy surgery is not medically necessary when performed due to intertrigo or any other skin condition that does not meet the criteria above.
- Panniculectomy surgery is not considered medically necessary as an aid to other procedures including, but not limited to, inguinal, umbilical, or hiatal abdominal hernia repairs. A ventral hernia is not considered unless the above criteria in this policy is met.
- Panniculectomy surgery is not considered medically necessary to improve activities of daily living without any of the skin conditions listed above.

7. Post-payment Audit Statement

The medical record must include documentation that reflects the medical necessity criteria and is subject to audit by Highmark Wholecare<sup>SM</sup> at any time pursuant to the terms of your provider agreement.

8. Place of Service

The proper place of service for a panniculectomy procedure requires an inpatient surgical stay.

9. Related Policy

- MP-004-MD-PA Bariatric Surgery

### **Governing Bodies Approval**

Panniculectomy is a procedure and is therefore not subject to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation, although any devices or drugs used for this procedure would require approval.

### **Summary of Literature**

When natural MWL happens over time, the body has time to adjust to the changes and allow the skin to reshape itself. On the other hand, 68% to 85% of MWL patients who are post-bariatric surgery desire body contouring surgery to remove a panniculus (Constantine et al., 2014). Approximately 256,000 bariatric surgeries were performed in the United States in 2019 (ASMBS, 2021). The increased number of bariatric surgeries has increased the prevalence and relevance of panniculectomies (Constantine, 2014). There are large amounts of panniculectomies performed succeeding bariatric surgery due to increased rate of MWL and the body's inability to contract and strengthen the epidermis. A panniculectomy is an operative procedure used for abdominal wall contouring, changing the shape and form of the abdomen. This procedure is performed on patients with a large overhanging abdominal panniculus (Sachs, Sequeira Campos, Murray. 2021).

Although many disorders and co-morbidities decrease with weight loss, there are defined issues following MWL. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2007), there are few alternative treatment options to a panniculectomy since it is virtually impossible to correct a panniculus by diet, additional weight loss, or exercise. The Journal of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (2015) published data that suggests significant outcomes to a panniculectomy do not include postoperative patient appearance but includes improved ADLs and skin conditions.

A major issue is that a large panniculus can lead to a severe impact on activities of daily life. Skin infections and rashes are common complaints of patients with a substantially large panniculus due to constant irritation and sweating (Sachs, Sequeira Campos, Murray, 2021). Intertrigo is a common skin disorder not considered within the realm of determinants for a medically necessary skin condition to approve a medically necessary panniculectomy. Intertrigo is simply the inflammation of skin folds and is commonly categorized secondary to cutaneous infections observed in this area (Janniger et al., 2005).

The size of a panniculus varies and can be graded on a scale of 1 to 5, which correlates with how far it extends. Grade 1 reaches the mons pubis, while a grade 5 extends to or reaches past the knees. A panniculectomy is performed to relieve these symptoms and restore formal function. During a panniculectomy, the excess skin and fat are removed. Tightening or plication of the abdominal wall muscle is not performed, which differentiates this procedure from an abdominoplasty - a cosmetic procedure, usually involving fascial plication (Sachs, Sequeira Campos, Murray, 2021).

In 2017, the ASPS noted that when a panniculectomy is performed to eliminate a large hanging abdominal panniculus done in part to reduce associated symptoms, cellulitis, intertrigo, shoulder pain, neck pain, back pain, thoracic spine pain, lumbago, and panniculitis, this would be considered reconstructive. The ASPS Practice Parameters explained that a panniculectomy could be considered as a functional correction in patients who are of appropriate height and weight, and have a history of problems including panniculitis or chronic back pain that have persisted despite an adequate trial of non-surgical management, or have a functional impairment in activities of daily living/ work, etc.

ASPS further commented on insurance coverage for panniculectomy and noted that in situations where a circumferential treatment approach is utilized to also treat the residual back and hip rolls or the ptotic buttock tissue, only the anterior portion of the procedures would be considered reconstructive, the remaining portion of the procedure would be considered cosmetic. Only in rare circumstances will buttock, thigh or arm lifts be needed to treat functional abnormalities. Typically, these procedures are performed to improve appearance and are therefore cosmetic in nature.

Side effects are dependent on the type and extent of the procedure. Possible side effects include:

- Seroma
  - Dehiscence
  - Infection
  - Hematoma
  - Skin necrosis
  - Lymphedema
  - Deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary embolus
  - Psychiatric difficulty
  - Residual localized fat and/or fat necrosis leading to contour irregularities
  - Temporary or permanent numbness
  - Unattractive or hypertrophic scarring
  - Malposition of the umbilicus
  - Relapse or recurrent laxity
  - Folds and Wrinkles
  - Additional Surgical Procedures
- (ASPS, 2017)

Some research suggests a panniculectomy should be considered medically necessary when performed in conjunction with abdominal or gynecologic procedures (e.g., abdominal hernia repair, hysterectomy) (Gurunluoglu, 2008). This research does not present ample evidence to support consideration of abdominal or gynecologic procedures (Harth et al., 2011). Types of abdominal procedures that are excluded from being performed in conjunction with the panniculectomy include but are not limited to inguinal hernia repair, umbilical hernia repair, hiatal hernia repair, and ventral (incisional) hernia repair (unless all criteria for a panniculectomy alone are met for ventral hernias). In 2011, a study performed with the American Journal of Surgery proved conjoining a panniculectomy with abdominal procedures is feasible, but the potential benefit in reducing recurrent hernias remains unclear (Harth, et al., 2011). In addition, the study found there was short-term wound morbidity with post-bariatric panniculectomy cases, compromising hernia repair (Harth et al., 2011). Forty percent of patients that underwent a simultaneous panniculectomy required additional operative debridement or percutaneous intervention (Harth, et al., 2011). The only procedures under consideration (secondary to panniculectomy criteria) include ventral hernia repair or incisional hernia repair. Incisional hernias occurred in 20% of postoperative bariatric patients, which are a direct effect of MWL, a result similar to the formation and appearance of the panniculus (Rao et al., 2011).

An additional consideration is adjoining the panniculectomy procedure with a colostomy procedure. A very large panniculus may cause stomal retraction in patients that have an existing colostomy (Ito et al., 2016). In order to prevent distention to the stoma, it is optimal to perform a stomaplasty or a revision colostomy around the surgical site (Ito et al., 2016).

## **Coding Requirements**

### Procedure Codes

CPT Code	Description
15830	Excision, excessive skin and subcutaneous tissue; abdomen, infraumbilical panniculectomy

### Non-covered Procedure Codes

*These procedure codes will not be reimbursed without Medical Director approval*

CPT Code	Description
15847	Excision, excessive skin and subcutaneous tissue (includes lipectomy); abdomen (e.g., abdominoplasty) (includes umbilical transposition and fascial plication) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
15877	Suction assist lipectomy, trunk

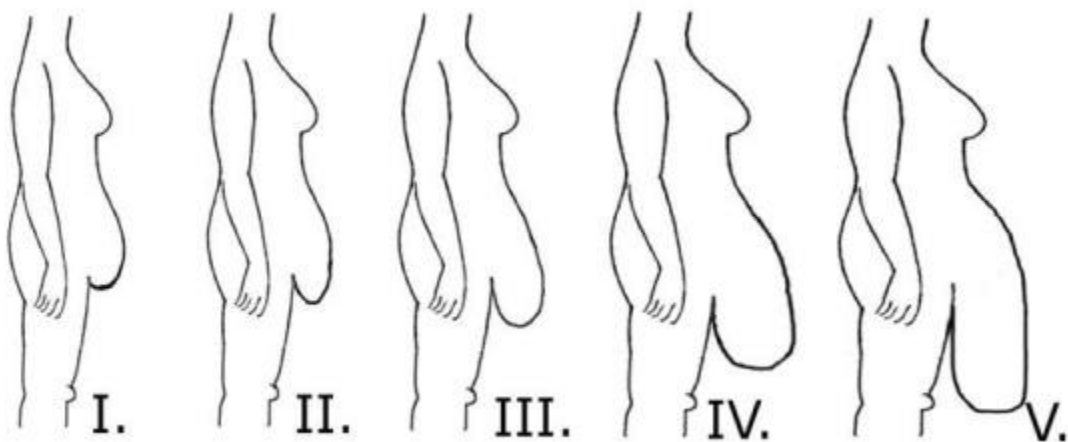
### Diagnosis Codes

ICD-10 Code	Description
L02.219	Cutaneous abscess of trunk, unspecified
L03.311	Cellulitis of abdominal wall
L03.316	Cellulitis of umbilicus
L03.319	Cellulitis of trunk, unspecified
L03.321	Acute lymphangitis of abdominal wall

L03.326	Acute lymphangitis of umbilicus
L03.329	Acute lymphangitis of trunk, unspecified
I89.0	Lymphedema, not elsewhere classified
I89.1	Chronic lymphangitis
L98.491	Non-pressure chronic ulcer of skin of other sites limited to breakdown of skin
L98.492	Non-pressure chronic ulcer of skin of other sites with fat layer exposed
L98.493	Non-pressure chronic ulcer of skin of other sites with necrosis of muscle
E65	Localized adiposity
M79.3	Panniculitis, unspecified

## **Informational**

### **Panniculus Severity Grading Scale**



- **Grade I** patients with a panniculus that covers the hairline and the mons pubis but not the genitals
- **Grade II** extends to cover the genitals
- **Grade III** extends to cover the upper thigh
- **Grade IV** extends to cover the mid-thigh
- **Grade V** extends to cover the knees or beyond

## **Reimbursement**

Participating facilities will be reimbursed per their Highmark Wholecare<sup>SM</sup> contract.

## **Reference Sources**

Erdmann D. Resection of Panniculus Morbidus: A Salvage Procedure with a Steep Learning Curve. Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery. 2008. Accessed on December 19, 2016.

American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). Practice Parameter for Surgical Treatment of Skin Redundancy Following Massive Weight Loss. June, 2017. Accessed on November 9, 2021.

American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). Recommended Insurance Coverage Criteria for Third-Party Payers: Panniculectomy. July 2006. Re-approved in March, 2019. Accessed on November 9, 2021.

American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). ASPS Recommended Insurance Coverage Criteria for Third Party Payers: Surgical Treatment of Skin Redundancy for Obese and Massive Weight Loss Patients. June, 2017. Accessed on November 9, 2021.

Constantine RS, Davis KE, Kenkel JM. The Effect of Massive Weight Loss Status Amount of Weight Loss, and Method of Weight Loss on Body Contouring Outcomes. Aesthetic Surgery Journal. 2014. Accessed on December 19, 2016.

Gurunluoglu R. Panniculectomy and redundant skin surgery in massive weight loss patients: current guidelines and recommendations for medical necessity determination. Ann Plastic Surgery. 2008. Accessed on December 20, 2016.

Harth KC, Blatnik JA, Rosen MJ. Optimum repair for massive ventral hernias in the morbidly obese patient—is panniculectomy helpful? American journal of surgery. 2007. Accessed on December 20, 2016.

Ito E, Kitajima M, Tsutsui N. Stomoplasty with panniculectomy in an obese patient with stomal retraction: A case report. International Journal of Surgery Case Reports. May 2016. Accessed on December 20, 2016.

Janniger KC, Schwartz RA, Szepietowski JC, Reich A. Intertrigo and Common Secondary Skin Infections. American Family Physician. 2005. Accessed on December 16, 2016.

Ponce J. New procedure estimates for bariatric surgery: what the numbers reveal. Connect. American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. May 2014. Accessed on December 19, 2016.

Rao RS, Gentileschi P, Kini SU. Management of ventral hernias in bariatric surgery. Surgery for Obesity and Related Diseases. 2011. Accessed on December 6, 2016.

American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS). Estimate of Bariatric Surgery Numbers, 2011-2019. March 2021. Accessed on November 9, 2021.

Sachs D, Sequeira Campos M, Murray J. Panniculectomy. StatPearls. January, 2021. Accessed on November 9, 2021.