



## Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP)

Please note, this communication applies to Anthem HealthKeepers Plus, Medallion and Anthem HealthKeepers Plus, Commonwealth Coordinated Care Plus (Anthem CCC Plus) offered by HealthKeepers, Inc.

The HEDIS<sup>®</sup> measure Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP) analyzes the percentage of patients 18 to 50 years of age during the measurement year with a primary diagnosis of low back pain who did not have an imaging study (plain X-ray, MRI, CT scan) within 28 days of the diagnosis. The measure is used to determine whether imaging studies are overused to evaluate members with low back pain. The measure is an inverted rate, meaning that a higher score indicates appropriate treatment of low back pain.

Clinical guidelines for treating patients with acute low back pain recommend against the use of imaging in the absence of red flags (indications of a serious underlying pathology such as a fracture or tumor). Unnecessary or routine imaging is problematic because it is not associated with improved outcomes and exposes patients to unnecessary harms such as radiation exposure and further unnecessary treatment.

Potential red flags to consider earlier imaging are easily remembered by the acronym **TUNA FISH**:

- **T**: Trauma or tuberculosis
- **U**: Unexplained loss of weight
- **N**: Neurological deficits, bowel and bladder incontinence
- **A**: Age < 20 and ≥ 55
- **F**: Fever
- **I**: Intravenous drug use
- **S**: Steroid use or immunosuppressed
- **H**: History of cancer

Consider alternative treatment options prior to ordering diagnostic imaging studies, such as:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.
- Nonpharmacologic treatment, such as heat and massage.
- Exercise to strengthen the core and low back or physical therapy.

### Resources:

- Noninvasive Treatments for Acute, Subacute, and Chronic Low Back Pain: A Clinical Practice Guideline From the American College of Physicians *Ann Intern Med.* 2017; 166(7):514-530
- Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP) HEDIS Measures and Technical Resources <https://www.ncqa.org/hedis>.
- Choosing Wisely: [Choosingwisely.org](https://www.choosingwisely.org).
- American Academy of Family Physicians: [AAFP.org](https://www.aafp.org).

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If you have any questions about this communication, call Anthem HealthKeepers Plus, Medallion Provider Services at **800-901-0020** or Anthem CCC Plus Provider Services at **855-323-4687**.



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