

Molina Clinical Policy

Foot Surgery: Lesser Toe Deformities (Hammer, Mallet, Claw Toe)

Policy No. 702

Last Approval: 4/13/2023

Next Review Due By: April 2024



DISCLAIMER

This Molina Clinical Policy (MCP) is intended to facilitate the Utilization Management process. Policies are not a supplementation or recommendation for treatment; Providers are solely responsible for the diagnosis, treatment, and clinical recommendations for the Member. It expresses Molina's determination as to whether certain services or supplies are medically necessary, experimental, investigational, or cosmetic for purposes of determining appropriateness of payment. The conclusion that a particular service or supply is medically necessary does not constitute a representation or warranty that this service or supply is covered (e.g., will be paid for by Molina) for a particular Member. The Member's benefit plan determines coverage – each benefit plan defines which services are covered, which are excluded, and which are subject to dollar caps or other limits. Members and their Providers will need to consult the Member's benefit plan to determine if there are any exclusion(s) or other benefit limitations applicable to this service or supply. If there is a discrepancy between this policy and a Member's plan of benefits, the benefits plan will govern. In addition, coverage may be mandated by applicable legal requirements of a State, the Federal government or CMS for Medicare and Medicaid Members. CMS's Coverage Database can be found on the CMS website. The coverage directive(s) and criteria from an existing National Coverage Determination (NCD) or Local Coverage Determination (LCD) will supersede the contents of this MCP and provide the directive for all Medicare members. References included were accurate at the time of policy approval and publication.

OVERVIEW

This policy addresses the surgical treatment of lesser toe deformities (hammer toe, claw toe, and mallet toe) and applies to all three deformities, as their etiologies and treatments are similar.

A **hammertoe** is defined as a deformity in which the proximal interphalangeal joint (PIP) is in a flexed position. A **claw toe** deformity involves flexion at the PIP and distal interphalangeal joints (DIP) while the metatarsal phalangeal joint (MTP joint) is in a neutral or extended position. A **mallet toe** involves only the DIP, which is in a flexed position (Malhotra et al., 2016).

Hammertoe, one of the most common forefoot deformities, is a deformity of the second, third, or fourth toes in which a flexion deformity develops at the PIP joint and causes the toe tip to be depressed downward (Mueller et al., 2018). The two types of hammertoes are flexible and rigid hammertoe. Flexible hammertoe is defined as hammertoe where the MTP (the first joint that connects the toe to the foot), PIP (the second joint that connects the toe to the foot), and the DIP joint (the last joint that connects the toe to the foot) can be returned to a neutral position with active manipulation or ankle plantar flexion. Rigid hammertoe is where the MTP, PIP, and DIP joints cannot be returned to a neutral position with active manipulation. Initially, a hammer toe is flexible, but if left untreated, it may become rigid. Treatments must address and evaluate the deformity at all joints of the affected digit including the PIP joint, MTP joint, and DIP joint (Goransson & Constant, 2022).

Nonsurgical treatment options include wider-toed shoes, toe sleeves, padding, splints, taping, and orthotics. These modifications can be beneficial for managing forefoot disorders, however, none of these techniques are permanent solutions to the deformity and pain may persist with worsening deformity. Surgical intervention should be considered if functionality and pain do not improve. The goal of surgical treatment is to improve symptoms by restoring alignment and function and avoiding recurrence. The type of surgical treatment for a toe deformity is determined by the flexibility and severity of the deformity, as well as any associated pathology. Correction of both flexible and rigid deformities may necessitate single or multiple procedures. Flexible deformities are amenable to soft-tissue procedures, whereas rigid deformities require at least a component of the bony intervention.

1. **Flexible hammertoe** frequently requires a combination of soft tissue and bony procedures to achieve a satisfactory correction of the deformity. Surgical options include for flexible hammertoe include:
 - *Flexor tenotomy (tendon lengthening)* involves a small incision to release the tendon, allowing the toe to extend fully.
 - *Tendon transfer* involves a tendon on the bottom of the toe that is rerouted over the bent part of the toe, pulling it down into a straighter position.
2. **Rigid hammertoe** (cannot be treated with tenotomy or tendon transfer) requires PIP joint resection arthroplasty or PIP joint arthrodesis:

- *PIP joint arthroplasty*, a common procedure for rigid hammertoes, is the surgical reconstruction or replacement of a painful, damaged joint due to degeneration (e.g., arthritis), trauma, or deformity. The end of one of the bones is removed to make room for the toe to straighten, followed by a pin or plate to stabilize the bones while they heal. Arthroplasty at the DIP or PIP joint includes resection of half of the articular surface of the joint. This procedure may be performed with flexor tenotomy for flexible or semirigid deformities; however, flexor tenotomy is contraindicated as the sole procedure for rigid hammertoe deformities. A non-reducible, rigid hammertoe deformity is an osseous problem that requires more than just a tenotomy.
- *PIP joint arthrodesis*, or joint fusion surgery, is like arthroplasty in that both ends of the bones in the toe joint are cut and held together with a pin, allowing them to fuse together as they heal. Arthrodesis relieves joint pain and restores joint stability; however, joint motion is lost during the procedure.

RELATED POLICIES

MCP-700: Foot Surgery: Bunionectomy

MCP-701: Foot Surgery: Hallux Rigidus

COVERAGE POLICY

Hammertoe or Claw toe (PIP joint) and Mallet toe (DIP joint) may be considered medically necessary for members who meet **ALL** the following criteria:

A. Member meets **ONE** of the following (**1, 2, OR 3**)

1. Diagnosis of **hammertoe** based on **ALL** following:
 - a. Flexion deformity at PIP joint; **AND**
 - b. Metatarsophalangeal (MTP) joint normal or dorsiflexed; **AND**
 - c. Nonreducible deformity at PIP joint.

OR

2. Diagnosis of **claw toe** based on **ALL** following:
 - a. Distal interphalangeal (DIP) joint plantar flexed; **AND**
 - b. MTP joint dorsiflexed; **AND**
 - c. PIP joint plantar flexed; **AND**
 - d. For hammertoe or claw toe: Nonreducible deformity at PIP joint;
For mallet toe: Flexion deformity at DIP joint.

OR

3. Diagnosis of **mallet toe** based on **ALL** following:
 - a. Flexion deformity at DIP joint by physical examination; **AND**
 - b. Nonreducible deformity at DIP joint.

AND

B. Radiographic confirmation and interpretation of the affected foot, indicating at least **ONE** of the following imaging findings:

1. Flexion deformity at PIP joint; **OR**
2. Joint subluxation or dislocation; **OR**
3. Joint space narrowing.

AND

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C. Member has clinical symptoms and a history of conservative management AND meets **ALL** following criteria:

1. Documentation of ANY of the following signs/symptoms directly attributable to a lesser toe deformity:
 - Significant and persistent pain at the PIP joint; **OR**
 - Ulceration or skin breakdown at the PIP joint; **OR**
 - Clinically significant functional limitation resulting in impaired ambulation.

AND

2. Persistent pain and functional limitation despite at least 6 months of conservative treatment under the supervision of a healthcare practitioner, including but not limited to the following:
 - Alternative or modified footwear: accommodative shoe with wide toe box and low heels; **AND**
 - Protective cushions; taping or adhesive devices; foot orthotics; **OR**
 - Oral medication (e.g., acetaminophen, NSAID) or corticosteroid injections; **OR**
 - Debridement or trimming of hyperkeratotic lesions (e.g., calluses).

LIMITATIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

The following are considered **experimental, investigational, and unproven** based on insufficient evidence:

1. Any indications other than those listed above
2. Asymptomatic hammertoe, claw toe, or mallet toe (no pain or limitations in daily activities).
3. Surgical intervention solely for the improvement of appearance or for cosmetic purposes.
4. Joint fixation implant or replacement (e.g., InterPhlex hammertoe system, OSSIOfiber hammertoe fixation implant. Smart Toe II device, StayFuse device, ToeGrip device) is considered experimental and investigational for lesser toe deformities (hammer toe, claw toe, and mallet toe) due to a lack of evidence of effectiveness and safety in the peer-reviewed published medical literature (Basile et al. 2015; Obrador et al. 2018).

The following are considered **contraindications/exclusions** based on insufficient evidence:

1. Active infection of the foot or joint, unless correction of lesser toe deformity is necessary for wound management (e.g., nonhealing ulcer over the medial prominence).
2. Severe vascular insufficiency.

AGE RESTRICTION: 18 years of age or skeletally mature confirmed with documentation of epiphyseal closure.

CONTINUATION OF THERAPY: Repeat hammertoe surgical treatment may be considered medically necessary following the failure of a previous surgical procedure. All procedures must meet authorization criteria as outlined above.

ADMINISTRATION: Outpatient

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS. Molina Healthcare reserves the right to require that additional documentation be made available as part of its coverage determination; quality improvement; and fraud; waste and abuse prevention processes. Documentation required may include, but is not limited to, patient records, test results, and credentials of the provider ordering or performing a drug or service. Molina Healthcare may deny reimbursement or take additional appropriate action if the documentation provided does not support the initial determination that the drugs or services were medically necessary, not investigational, or experimental, and otherwise within the scope of benefits afforded to the member, and/or the documentation demonstrates a pattern of billing or other practice that is inappropriate or excessive.

SUMMARY OF MEDICAL EVIDENCE

American Orthopedic Foot & Ankle Society (AOFAS, 2021) issued the following recommendation on avoiding surgery for bunion or hammertoes:

Foot surgery for cosmetic reasons is not supported by medical research. Symptoms such as pain and limitations of activity are the most common reasons to pursue bunion or hammertoe surgery. Patients having surgery for bunions and hammertoes are at risk for a wide range of complications such as nerve damage, infection, bone healing problems, and toe stiffness.

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Treatment of Rigid Hammer-Toe Deformity: Permanent Versus Removable Implant Selection

Doty & Fogleman (2018) in a review of the treatment of rigid hammertoe deformity noted the following:

- “The type of surgical intervention is determined by the relative flexibility of the deformity and the presence or absence of associated metatarsophalangeal joint deformity or instability.
- Patients must have adequate vascularity to heal surgical sites before successfully addressing hammer-toe deformity.
- Fixed hammer-toe deformities can be successfully treated with proximal interphalangeal joint resection arthroplasty or fusion, with high patient satisfaction and low complication rates.
- Patient satisfaction does not depend on proximal interphalangeal joint bony fusion, as fibrous unions often remain asymptomatic; but malalignment is often poorly tolerated.
- Temporary Kirschner-wire fixation remains extremely popular for hammer-toe correction, but multiple permanent implants exist with high efficacy rates.”

Treatment of Flexible Lesser Toe Deformities

Frey-Ollivier et al. (2018) summarized the following in a review of flexible lesser toe deformity management:

- The clinical descriptions of hammer toes, claw toes, and mallet toes are poor and inconsistent.
- Classification of lesser toe deformities must be done using both clinical and radiological evaluation.
- First-line treatment of flexible toe deformities should be based on a combination of special orthoses, taping, or strapping to improve toe alignment.
- Percutaneous tenotomies and/or osteotomies are mainly appropriate according to morphologic criteria (a `la carte) but also according to etiologic and reducibility criteria.

CODING & BILLING INFORMATION

CPT Codes

CPT	Description
28285	Correction, hammertoe (e.g., interphalangeal fusion, partial or total phalangectomy)
28286	Correction, cock-up fifth toe, with plastic skin closure (e.g., Ruiz-Mora type procedure)
28010	Tenotomy, percutaneous, toe; single tendon
28011	Tenotomy, percutaneous, toe; multiple tendons
28232	Tenotomy, open, tendon flexor; toe, single tendon (separate procedure)
28234	Tenotomy, open, extensor, foot or toe, each tendon

Not Covered: L8641 Metatarsal joint implant

CODING DISCLAIMER. Codes listed in this policy are for reference purposes only and may not be all-inclusive. Deleted codes and codes which are not effective at the time the service is rendered may not be eligible for reimbursement. Listing of a service or device code in this policy does not guarantee coverage. Coverage is determined by the benefit document. Molina adheres to Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®), a registered trademark of the American Medical Association (AMA). All CPT codes and descriptions are copyrighted by the AMA; this information is included for informational purposes only. Providers and facilities are expected to utilize industry standard coding practices for all submissions. When improper billing and coding is not followed, Molina has the right to reject/deny the claim and recover claim payment(s). Due to changing industry practices, Molina reserves the right to revise this policy as needed.

APPROVAL HISTORY

4/13/2023 New policy, replaces MCP-401: Foot Surgery. IRO Peer Review March 29, 2023, by a practicing, board-certified physician in Orthopedic Surgery.

REFERENCES

Government Agency

1. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Medicare coverage database (no National Coverage Determination identified). Accessed March 2023. <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/search.aspx>.

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Peer Reviewed Publications

1. Basile A, Albo F, Via AG. Intramedullary fixation system for the treatment of hammertoe deformity. *J Foot Ankle Surg.* 2015;54(5):910-916.
2. Doty JF, Fogleman JA. Treatment of Rigid Hammer-Toe Deformity: Permanent Versus Removable Implant Selection. *Foot Ankle Clin.* 2018 Mar;23(1):91-101. doi: 10.1016/j.fcl.2017.09.007. PMID: 29362037.
3. Frey-Ollivier S, Catena F, Hélix-Giordanino M, Piclet-Legré B. Treatment of flexible lesser toe deformities. *Foot Ankle Clin.* 2018 Mar;23(1):69-90. doi: 10.1016/j.fcl.2017.10.002. Epub 2017 Dec 12. PMID: 29362035.
4. Malhotra K, Davda K, Singh D. The pathology and management of lesser toe deformities. *EFORT Open Rev.* 2016 Nov;1(11):409-419.
5. Mueller CM, Boden SA, Boden AL, et al. Complication rates and short-term outcomes after operative hammertoe correction in older patients. *Foot Ankle Int.* 2018 Jun;39(6):681-688.
6. Obrador C, Losa-Iglesias M, Becerro-de-Bengoa-Vallejo R, Kabbash CA. Comparativestudy of intramedullary hammertoe fixation. *Foot Ankle Int.* 2018;39(4):415-425.

National and Specialty Organization

1. American Orthopedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS). Evidence-Based Medicine Committee. Choosing Wisely. March 2023. <https://www.choosingwisely.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/AOFAS-Choosing-Wisely-List.pdf>.

Other Authoritative Publications (used in the development of this policy; not cited)

1. DynaMed. EBSCO Information Services. Hammertoe. Accessed March 2023. <http://www.dynamed.com>.
2. Goransson M, Constant D. Hammertoe. [Updated 2022 May 30]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan-. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559268/>.
3. DiPrea JA. Metatarsalgia, lesser toe deformities, and associated disorders of the forefoot. *Med Clin North Am.* 2014 Mar;98(2):233-51. doi: 10.1016/j.mcna.2013.10.003. Epub 2013 Dec 10. PMID: 24559872.
4. Malhotra K, Davda K, Singh D. The pathology and management of lesser toe deformities. *EFORT Open Rev.* 2017 Mar 13;1(11):409-419. doi: 10.1302/2058-5241.1.160017. PMID: 28461920; PMCID: PMC5367573.
5. Fields K. Evaluation and diagnosis of common causes of forefoot pain in adults. Updated February 6, 2023. Accessed March 2023. <http://www.uptodate.com>.

APPENDIX

Reserved for State specific information. Information includes, but is not limited to, State contract language, Medicaid criteria and other mandated criteria.