Spinal Fusion and Decompression

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➲ Instructions for Use

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Related Commercial/Individual Exchange Policies

- Discogenic Pain Treatment
- Epidural Steroid Injections for Spinal Pain
- Facet Joint and Medial Branch Block Injections for Spinal Pain
- Interspinous Fusion and Decompression Devices
- Spinal Fusion and Bone Healing Enhancement Products
- Total Artificial Disc Replacement for the Spine
- Vertebral Body Tethering for Scoliosis

Community Plan Policy

- Spinal Fusion and Decompression

Application

UnitedHealthcare Commercial

This Medical Policy applies to UnitedHealthcare Commercial benefit plans.

UnitedHealthcare Individual Exchange

This Medical Policy applies to Individual Exchange benefit plans.

Coverage Rationale

Spinal procedures for the treatment of spine pain are proven and medically necessary in certain circumstances.
For medical necessity clinical coverage criteria, refer to the InterQual® CP: Procedures:

- Decompression +/- Fusion, Cervical
- Decompression +/- Fusion, Lumbar
- Decompression +/- Fusion, Thoracic
- Fusion, Cervical Spine
- Fusion, Lumbar Spine
- Fusion, Thoracic Spine
- Scoliosis or Kyphosis Surgery
- Scoliosis or Kyphosis Surgery (Pediatric)

Click here to view the InterQual® criteria.

Dividing treatment of symptomatic, multisite spinal pathology via anterior or posterior approach into serial or Staged Multiple Sessions when one session can address all sites is unproven and not medically necessary due to insufficient evidence of safety and efficacy.

The following procedures for the treatment of spine pain are unproven and not medically necessary due to insufficient evidence of efficacy:

- Dynamic Stabilization systems

- Facet Joint Replacement
- Isolated Facet Joint Fusion, with or without instrumentation
- Vertebral joint implants that replace the disc and facet joints (e.g., MOTUS)

Medical Records Documentation Used for Reviews

Benefit coverage for health services is determined by the member specific benefit plan document and applicable laws that may require coverage for a specific service. Medical records documentation may be required to assess whether the member meets the clinical criteria for coverage but does not guarantee coverage of the service requested; refer to the protocol titled Medical Records Documentation Used for Reviews.

Definitions

Dynamic Stabilization: Also called flexible fusion or soft stabilization. A surgical procedure that stabilizes the spine with the insertion of a motion-preserving, flexible implant designed to provide more mobility than traditional spinal fusion. The procedure uses rods, cords, and spacers to stabilize spinal segments and reduce pressure on the intervertebral disc and facet joints (Hayes, 2025).

Facet Joint Replacement: Also called total facet arthroplasty. A surgical procedure that replaces the facet joints using flexible materials to stabilize the spine as an alternative to fusion.

Isolated Facet Joint Fusion: Also called facet arthrodesis. Facet joint fusion without decompression. A surgical procedure that fuses the facet joint using allograft bone dowels made from donated cortical bone.

Staged Multiple Sessions: Includes procedures performed on different days or those requiring an additional anesthesia session.

Applicable Codes

The following list(s) of procedure and/or diagnosis codes is provided for reference purposes only and may not be all inclusive. Listing of a code in this policy does not imply that the service described by the code is a covered or non-covered health service. Benefit coverage for health services is determined by the member specific benefit plan document and applicable laws that may require coverage for a specific service. The inclusion of a code does not imply any right to reimbursement or guarantee claim payment. Other Policies and Guidelines may apply.

CPT Code	Description
0202T	Posterior vertebral joint(s) arthroplasty (e.g., facet joint[s] replacement), including facetectomy, laminectomy, foraminotomy, and vertebral column fixation, injection of bone cement, when performed, including fluoroscopy, single level, lumbar spine
0219T	Placement of a posterior intrafacet implant(s), unilateral or bilateral, including imaging and placement of bone graft(s) or synthetic device(s), single level; cervical
0220T	Placement of a posterior intrafacet implant(s), unilateral or bilateral, including imaging and placement of bone graft(s) or synthetic device(s), single level; thoracic
0221T	Placement of a posterior intrafacet implant(s), unilateral or bilateral, including imaging and placement of bone graft(s) or synthetic device(s), single level; lumbar
0222T	Placement of a posterior intrafacet implant(s), unilateral or bilateral, including imaging and placement of bone graft(s) or synthetic device(s), single level; each additional vertebral segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
0719T	Posterior vertebral joint replacement, including bilateral facetectomy, laminectomy, and radical discectomy, including imaging guidance, lumbar spine, single segment
22206	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 3 columns, 1 vertebral segment (e.g., pedicle/vertebral body subtraction); thoracic
22207	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 3 columns, 1 vertebral segment (e.g., pedicle/vertebral body subtraction); lumbar

CPT Code	Description
22208	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 3 columns, 1 vertebral segment (e.g., pedicle/vertebral body subtraction); each additional vertebral segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22210	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 1 vertebral segment; cervical
22212	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 1 vertebral segment; thoracic
22214	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 1 vertebral segment; lumbar
22216	Osteotomy of spine, posterior or posterolateral approach, 1 vertebral segment; each additional vertebral segment (List separately in addition to primary procedure)
22220	Osteotomy of spine, including discectomy, anterior approach, single vertebral segment; cervical
22222	Osteotomy of spine, including discectomy, anterior approach, single vertebral segment; thoracic
22224	Osteotomy of spine, including discectomy, anterior approach, single vertebral segment; lumbar
22226	Osteotomy of spine, including discectomy, anterior approach, single vertebral segment; each additional vertebral segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22532	Arthrodesis, lateral extracavitary technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); thoracic
22533	Arthrodesis, lateral extracavitary technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); lumbar
22534	Arthrodesis, lateral extracavitary technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); thoracic or lumbar, each additional vertebral segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22548	Arthrodesis, anterior transoral or extraoral technique, clivus-C1-C2 (atlas-axis), with or without excision of odontoid process
22551	Arthrodesis, anterior interbody, including disc space preparation, discectomy, osteophytectomy and decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve roots; cervical below C2
22552	Arthrodesis, anterior interbody, including disc space preparation, discectomy, osteophytectomy and decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve roots; cervical below C2, each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for separate procedure)
22554	Arthrodesis, anterior interbody technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); cervical below C2
22556	Arthrodesis, anterior interbody technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); thoracic
22558	Arthrodesis, anterior interbody technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); lumbar
22585	Arthrodesis, anterior interbody technique, including minimal discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression); each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22590	Arthrodesis, posterior technique, craniocervical (occiput-C2)
22595	Arthrodesis, posterior technique, atlas-axis (C1-C2)
22600	Arthrodesis, posterior or posterolateral technique, single interspace; cervical below C2 segment
22610	Arthrodesis, posterior or posterolateral technique, single interspace; thoracic (with lateral transverse technique, when performed)
22612	Arthrodesis, posterior or posterolateral technique, single interspace; lumbar (with lateral transverse technique, when performed)
22614	Arthrodesis, posterior or posterolateral technique, single interspace; each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22630	Arthrodesis, posterior interbody technique, including laminectomy and/or discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression), single interspace, lumbar
22632	Arthrodesis, posterior interbody technique, including laminectomy and/or discectomy to prepare interspace (other than for decompression), single interspace, lumbar; each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

CPT Code	Description
22633	Arthrodesis, combined posterior or posterolateral technique with posterior interbody technique including laminectomy and/or discectomy sufficient to prepare interspace (other than for decompression), single interspace, lumbar
22634	Arthrodesis, combined posterior or posterolateral technique with posterior interbody technique including laminectomy and/or discectomy sufficient to prepare interspace (other than for decompression), single interspace, lumbar; each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22800	Arthrodesis, posterior, for spinal deformity, with or without cast; up to 6 vertebral segments
22802	Arthrodesis, posterior, for spinal deformity, with or without cast; 7 to 12 vertebral segments
22804	Arthrodesis, posterior, for spinal deformity, with or without cast; 13 or more vertebral segments
22808	Arthrodesis, anterior, for spinal deformity, with or without cast; 2 to 3 vertebral segments
22810	Arthrodesis, anterior, for spinal deformity, with or without cast; 4 to 7 vertebral segments
22812	Arthrodesis, anterior, for spinal deformity, with or without cast; 8 or more vertebral segments
22830	Exploration of spinal fusion
22840	Posterior non-segmental instrumentation (e.g., Harrington rod technique, pedicle fixation across 1 interspace, atlantoaxial transarticular screw fixation, sublaminar wiring at C1, facet screw fixation) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22841	Internal spinal fixation by wiring of spinous processes (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22842	Posterior segmental instrumentation (e.g., pedicle fixation, dual rods with multiple hooks and sublaminar wires); 3 to 6 vertebral segments (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22843	Posterior segmental instrumentation (e.g., pedicle fixation, dual rods with multiple hooks and sublaminar wires); 7 to 12 vertebral segments (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22844	Posterior segmental instrumentation (e.g., pedicle fixation, dual rods with multiple hooks and sublaminar wires); 13 or more vertebral segments (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22845	Anterior instrumentation; 2 to 3 vertebral segments (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22846	Anterior instrumentation; 4 to 7 vertebral segments (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22847	Anterior instrumentation; 8 or more vertebral segments (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22848	Pelvic fixation (attachment of caudal end of instrumentation to pelvic bony structures) other than sacrum (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22849	Reinsertion of spinal fixation device
22850	Removal of posterior nonsegmental instrumentation (e.g., Harrington rod)
22852	Removal of posterior segmental instrumentation
22853	Insertion of interbody biomechanical device(s) (e.g., synthetic cage, mesh) with integral anterior instrumentation for device anchoring (e.g., screws, flanges), when performed, to intervertebral disc space in conjunction with interbody arthrodesis, each interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22854	Insertion of intervertebral biomechanical device(s) (e.g., synthetic cage, mesh) with integral anterior instrumentation for device anchoring (e.g., screws, flanges), when performed, to vertebral corpectomy(ies) (vertebral body resection, partial or complete) defect, in conjunction with interbody arthrodesis, each contiguous defect (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
22855	Removal of anterior instrumentation
22859	Insertion of intervertebral biomechanical device(s) (e.g., synthetic cage, mesh, methylmethacrylate) to intervertebral disc space or vertebral body defect without interbody arthrodesis, each contiguous defect (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

CPT Code	Description
22899	Unlisted procedure, spine
62380	Endoscopic decompression of spinal cord, nerve root(s), including laminotomy, partial facetectomy, foraminotomy, discectomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc, 1 interspace, lumbar
63001	Laminectomy with exploration and/or decompression of spinal cord and/or cauda equina, without facetectomy, foraminotomy or discectomy (e.g., spinal stenosis), 1 or 2 vertebral segments; cervical
63003	Laminectomy with exploration and/or decompression of spinal cord and/or cauda equina, without facetectomy, foraminotomy or discectomy (e.g., spinal stenosis), 1 or 2 vertebral segments; thoracic
63005	Laminectomy with exploration and/or decompression of spinal cord and/or cauda equina, without facetectomy, foraminotomy or discectomy (e.g., spinal stenosis), 1 or 2 vertebral segments; lumbar, except for spondylolisthesis
63012	Laminectomy with removal of abnormal facets and/or pars inter-articularis with decompression of cauda equina and nerve roots for spondylolisthesis, lumbar (Gill type procedure)
63015	Laminectomy with exploration and/or decompression of spinal cord and/or cauda equina, without facetectomy, foraminotomy or discectomy (e.g., spinal stenosis), more than 2 vertebral segments; cervical
63016	Laminectomy with exploration and/or decompression of spinal cord and/or cauda equina, without facetectomy, foraminotomy or discectomy (e.g., spinal stenosis), more than 2 vertebral segments; thoracic
63017	Laminectomy with exploration and/or decompression of spinal cord and/or cauda equina, without facetectomy, foraminotomy or discectomy (e.g., spinal stenosis), more than 2 vertebral segments; lumbar
63020	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc; 1 interspace, cervical
63030	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc; 1 interspace, lumbar
63035	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc; each additional interspace, cervical or lumbar (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63040	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc, reexploration, single interspace; cervical
63042	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc, reexploration, single interspace; lumbar
63043	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc, reexploration, single interspace; each additional cervical interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63044	Laminotomy (hemilaminectomy), with decompression of nerve root(s), including partial facetectomy, foraminotomy and/or excision of herniated intervertebral disc, reexploration, single interspace; each additional lumbar interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63045	Laminectomy, facetectomy and foraminotomy (unilateral or bilateral with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina and/or nerve root[s], [e.g., spinal or lateral recess stenosis]), single vertebral segment; cervical
63046	Laminectomy, facetectomy and foraminotomy (unilateral or bilateral with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina and/or nerve root[s], [e.g., spinal or lateral recess stenosis]), single vertebral segment; thoracic
63047	Laminectomy, facetectomy and foraminotomy (unilateral or bilateral with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina and/or nerve root[s], [e.g., spinal or lateral recess stenosis]), single vertebral segment; lumbar
63048	Laminectomy, facetectomy and foraminotomy (unilateral or bilateral with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina and/or nerve root[s], [e.g., spinal or lateral recess stenosis]), single vertebral segment; each additional vertebral segment, cervical, thoracic, or lumbar (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

CPT Code	Description
63050	Laminoplasty, cervical, with decompression of the spinal cord, 2 or more vertebral segments
63051	Laminoplasty, cervical, with decompression of the spinal cord, 2 or more vertebral segments; with reconstruction of the posterior bony elements (including the application of bridging bone graft and non-segmental fixation devices [e.g., wire, suture, mini-plates], when performed)
63052	Laminectomy, facetectomy, or foraminotomy (unilateral or bilateral with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina and/or nerve root[s] [e.g., spinal or lateral recess stenosis]), during posterior interbody arthrodesis, lumbar; single vertebral segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63053	Laminectomy, facetectomy, or foraminotomy (unilateral or bilateral with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina and/or nerve root[s] [e.g., spinal or lateral recess stenosis]), during posterior interbody arthrodesis, lumbar; each additional vertebral segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63055	Transpedicular approach with decompression of spinal cord, equina and/or nerve root(s) (e.g., herniated intervertebral disc), single segment; thoracic
63056	Transpedicular approach with decompression of spinal cord, equina and/or nerve root(s) (e.g., herniated intervertebral disc), single segment; lumbar (including transfacet, or lateral extraforaminal approach) (e.g., far lateral herniated intervertebral disc)
63057	Transpedicular approach with decompression of spinal cord, equina and/or nerve root(s) (e.g., herniated intervertebral disc), single segment; each additional segment, thoracic or lumbar (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63064	Costovertebral approach with decompression of spinal cord or nerve root(s) (e.g., herniated intervertebral disc), thoracic; single segment
63066	Costovertebral approach with decompression of spinal cord or nerve root(s) (e.g., herniated intervertebral disc), thoracic; each additional segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63075	Discectomy, anterior, with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s), including osteophytectomy; cervical, single interspace
63076	Discectomy, anterior, with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s), including osteophytectomy; cervical, each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63077	Discectomy, anterior, with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s), including osteophytectomy; thoracic, single interspace
63078	Discectomy, anterior, with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s), including osteophytectomy; thoracic, each additional interspace (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63081	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, anterior approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s); cervical, single segment
63082	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, anterior approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s); cervical, each additional segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63085	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, transthoracic approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s); thoracic, single segment
63086	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, transthoracic approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s); thoracic, each additional segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63087	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, combined thoracolumbar approach with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina or nerve root(s), lower thoracic or lumbar; single segment
63088	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, combined thoracolumbar approach with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina or nerve root(s), lower thoracic or lumbar; each additional segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

CPT Code	Description
63090	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, transperitoneal or retroperitoneal approach with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina or nerve root(s), lower thoracic, lumbar, or sacral; single segment
63091	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, transperitoneal or retroperitoneal approach with decompression of spinal cord, cauda equina or nerve root(s), lower thoracic, lumbar, or sacral; each additional segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63101	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, lateral extracavitary approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s) (e.g., for tumor or retropulsed bone fragments); thoracic, single segment
63102	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, lateral extracavitary approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s) (e.g., for tumor or retropulsed bone fragments); lumbar, single segment
63103	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, lateral extracavitary approach with decompression of spinal cord and/or nerve root(s) (e.g., for tumor or retropulsed bone fragments); thoracic or lumbar, each additional segment (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
63266	Laminectomy for excision or evacuation of intraspinal lesion other than neoplasm, extradural; thoracic
63267	Laminectomy for excision or evacuation of intraspinal lesion other than neoplasm, extradural; lumbar
63270	Laminectomy for excision of intraspinal lesion other than neoplasm, intradural; cervical
63271	Laminectomy for excision of intraspinal lesion other than neoplasm, intradural; thoracic
63272	Laminectomy for excision of intraspinal lesion other than neoplasm, intradural; lumbar
63275	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; extradural, cervical
63277	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; extradural, lumbar
63280	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; intradural, extramedullary, cervical
63282	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; intradural, extramedullary, lumbar
63285	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; intradural, intramedullary, cervical
63286	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; intradural, intramedullary, thoracic
63287	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; intradural, intramedullary, thoracolumbar
63290	Laminectomy for biopsy/excision of intraspinal neoplasm; combined extradural-intradural lesion, any level
63300	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; extradural, cervical
63301	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; extradural, thoracic by transthoracic approach
63302	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; extradural, thoracic by thoracolumbar approach
63303	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; extradural, lumbar or sacral by transperitoneal or retroperitoneal approach
63304	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; intradural, cervical
63305	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; intradural, thoracic by transthoracic approach
63306	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; intradural, thoracic by thoracolumbar approach
63307	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; intradural, lumbar or sacral by transperitoneal or retroperitoneal approach

CPT Code	Description
63308	Vertebral corpectomy (vertebral body resection), partial or complete, for excision of intraspinal lesion, single segment; each additional segment (List separately in addition to codes for single segment)

Description of Services

Back pain can occur when mechanical or structural problems develop in the spine or compress a nerve. Treatment varies depending on the cause and symptoms. Surgery may be an option for individuals whose pain cannot be controlled by more conservative methods (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, 2023). Several minimally invasive procedures that preserve motion and stabilize the spine are in development as an alternative to fusion.

Clinical Evidence

Multiple Serial/Staged Spine Procedures

There is insufficient evidence of efficacy to support dividing spine decompression procedures into serial, multiple, or staged sessions when one session can address all sites.

Dynamic Stabilization Systems

Due to the lack of data from well-designed, long-term randomized controlled trials (RCTs), current evidence is insufficient to permit conclusions about whether any beneficial effect from dynamic stabilization provides a significant advantage over conventional fusion techniques. The published evidence is not robust; a majority of the studies are retrospective or prospective case series and lack controls. In addition, the complication rates and reoperation rates with dynamic stabilization compared with those with conventional fusion are unknown.

Pham et al. (2016) conducted a review of the literature to explore complications associated with the Dynesys stabilization system. The researchers evaluated 21 studies, which included a total of 1,166 individuals, with a mean age of 55.5 years and a mean follow-up period of 33.7 months. The data demonstrated a surgical-site infection rate of 4.3%, pedicle screw loosening rate of 11.7%, pedicle screw fracture rate of 1.6%, and adjacent segment disease (ASD) rate of 7.0%. Among studies reporting surgical revision rates, 11.3% of individuals required reoperation. Of the individuals who developed ASD, 40.6% required reoperation for treatment. The authors concluded that the Dynesys stabilization system has a similar complication rate compared with lumbar fusion studies and has a slightly lower incidence of ASD.

Facet Joint Replacement

Due to the lack of data from well-designed, long-term RCTs, current evidence is insufficient to permit conclusions about the benefits and safety of facet joint replacement.

ECRI published a report on the Total Posterior Spine System (TOPS™) for treating lumbar spinal stenosis. TOPS is a posterior, pedicle screw-based spinal implant used for lumbar facet joint replacement as an alternative to spinal fusion in individuals with lumbar stenosis and grade I spondylolisthesis. The device is composed of a titanium construct with an interlocking polycarbonate urethane articulating core. After posterior decompression, surgeons insert TOPS into the lumbar vertebral joint and affix it using pedicle screws. ECRI reported that evidence from a multicenter RCT showed that TOPS provided better clinical success [no reoperations, major device adverse events, fusion failures, or new neurological deficits and clinically significant Oswestry Disability Index (ODI) improvement] than decompression with fusion at the 2-year follow-up. Clinical success was 73% in TOPS individuals and 25% in fusion individuals (fusion failure was 43.9%). Data from four case series suggest that TOPS's effects may last beyond 2 years. ECRI rated the level of evidence as low (ECRI, 2024).

Hayes published a report on the TOPS device for treating symptomatic lumbar spondylolisthesis with spinal stenosis. A review of full-text clinical studies suggested minimal support for using the TOPS System. No systematic reviews evaluating the device were identified (Hayes, 2024; updated 2025).

Nassr et al. (2024) performed a multicenter RCT in 321 participants with lumbar spinal stenosis and grade-I degenerative spondylolisthesis. A total of 321 adult participants were randomized in a 2:1 fashion, with 219 participants assigned to undergo facet arthroplasty and 102 participants assigned to undergo fusion. Of them, 113 participants (51.6%) in the arthroplasty group and 47 (46.1%) in the fusion group who had either reached 24 months of postoperative follow-up or were deemed early clinical failures were included in the primary outcome analysis. The arthroplasty group had a higher

proportion of participants who achieved composite clinical success than did the fusion group (73.5% vs 25.5%; p < 0.001), equating to a between-group difference of 47.9% (95% CI, 33.0%-62.8%). The arthroplasty group outperformed the fusion group in most patient-reported outcome measures [PROMs; including the ODI, visual analog scale (VAS) back pain, and all Zurich Claudication Questionnaire component scores] at 24 months post operation. No significant differences between groups in surgical variables or complications were observed, except that the fusion group had a higher rate of developing symptomatic ASD. The study demonstrated that decompression plus lumbar facet arthroplasty was associated with superior PROMs across multiple metrics; lower rates of new or progressive neurological symptoms; and lower rates of symptomatic ASD, equating to higher rates of composite clinical success compared with decompression plus fusion at 24 months post operation. Long-term follow-up will be necessary to determine differences in implant longevity, PROMs, and radiographic parameters such as stability of the spondylolisthesis and maintenance of motion beyond 2 years. A future RCT may be considered to compare lumbar facet arthroplasty vs decompression alone in a broader sample of participants. The primary limitation of this study is the relatively short postoperative follow-up, which precludes evaluation of the long-term durability of lumbar facet arthroplasty. A second limitation is that industry funding was used to perform this study. Third, this study was unable to mask surgeons, participants, or radiologists to the participants' treatment allocation post operation. Therefore, detection bias is a distinct possibility. Fourth, the trial used strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to mitigate the impact of confounding variables on the outcomes reported. Finally, this study reported the primary outcome in only approximately one half of the randomized sample; however, this is consistent with both the predetermined statistical plan and previous RCTs, in which a sufficiently large between-group difference was present at a preplanned interim analysis.

Pinter et al. (2023) conducted an interim analysis on the 1-year safety profile and clinical and radiographic outcomes in 153 individuals randomized to the investigational arm of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration investigational device exemption clinical trial for the TOPS device. Among the participants, 145 devices were implanted at L4-5 and eight at L3-4. Overall, 105 participants reached the 1-year follow-up and are included in the results. The safety profile showed 11 total complications and included new neurological deficits, dural tears infection, seroma, and hematoma as well as retained drains, misplaced pedicle screws, and screw loosening. Nine of these required a total of 13 reoperations. PROMs showed sustained improvement from 6 weeks to 12 months in ODI scores as well as mean VAS scores for low back and leg pain. Zurich Claudication Questionnaire symptom scores also improved. Radiographic parameters included global lordosis; disc height; disc angle; and magnitude and direction of spondylolisthesis, which were evaluated in 90 of the participants. Static radiographic parameters demonstrated increased index disc angle and disc height, with a reduction in the magnitude of spondylolisthesis. Comparison of dynamic radiographic parameters showed increased flexion/extension range of motion and translation.

Isolated Facet Joint Fusion

No studies were found evaluating facet joint fusion when performed alone, without an accompanying decompression procedure. The clinical evidence is insufficient to determine whether isolated facet arthroplasty is as effective or as safe as spinal fusion.

Vertebral Joint Replacement

Nunley et al. (2025) reported outcomes from a multicenter, investigational device exemption clinical trial evaluating the MOTUS total joint replacement (TJR) device for treating lumbar spine degeneration. TJR is a motion-preserving surgical approach that combines decompression with dynamic stabilization using a device that replaces the function of both the disc and facet. Patient-reported outcomes from 152 TJR individuals implanted with the MOTUS device were compared with 142 propensity score-weighted transforaminal lumbar interbody fusion or posterior lumbar interbody spine fusion controls. Lumbar-related disability was measured with the ODI and back and leg pain severity by VAS. At 12 months, mean ODI decreased by 45 points (71%) with TJR and 37 points (59%) with transforaminal lumbar interbody fusion/posterior lumbar interbody spine fusion. The adjusted between-group difference was 8.1 points. VAS back and leg pain decreases were similar between groups. Minimal clinically important difference responder rates were high (> 85%) for both procedures. Study limitations include a lack of randomization and short-term follow-up. Further studies, with longer-term follow-up, are necessary to confirm the safety and effectiveness of posterior lumbar decompression and dynamic stabilization with TJR.

Clinical Practice Guidelines

North American Spine Society (NASS)

Clinical guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of low back pain evaluated the impact of motion-preserving systems, such as dynamic stabilization, on pain relief, functional outcomes, and ASD. A systematic review of the literature yielded no studies. Due to the lack of clinical literature addressing these questions, the work group was unable to make a recommendation (NASS, 2020).

Clinical guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of degenerative lumbar spondylolisthesis evaluated the impact of flexible fusion on outcomes for the treatment of degenerative lumbar spondylolisthesis compared with nonoperative treatment. Due to the lack of clinical literature addressing this question, the work group was unable to make a recommendation (NASS, 2014).

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

This section is to be used for informational purposes only. FDA approval alone is not a basis for coverage.

Spinal Fusion Devices

There are several devices used in spinal fusion and decompression procedures. For additional information, see one of the following websites, and search by product name in the device field:
http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMN/pmn.cfm or
https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMA/pma.cfm. (Accessed October 30, 2025)

Facet Joint Replacement

On June 15, 2023, the FDA granted premarket approval of the TOPS System (Premia Spine USA, Norwalk, CT), a motion-preserving spinal implant intended to stabilize the spine following decompression without using rigid fixation. Further information can be found at: https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfpma/pma.cfm?id=P220002. (Accessed October 30, 2025)

References

ECRI. Clinical Evidence Assessment. TOPS System (Premia Spine, Ltd.) for treating lumbar spinal stenosis. October 2024.

Hayes. Evidence Analysis Research Brief. Dynamic spinal stabilization for treatment of degenerative disc disease. February 27, 2025.

Hayes. Evolving Evidence Review. TOPS System (Premia Spine) for treatment of symptomatic lumbar spondylolisthesis with spinal stenosis. May 14, 2024. Updated June 24, 2025.

Nassr A, Coric D, Pinter ZW, et al. Lumbar facet arthroplasty versus fusion for grade-I degenerative spondylolisthesis with stenosis: a prospective randomized controlled trial. J Bone Joint Surg Am. 2024 Jun 19;106(12):1041-1053.

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. Back Pain. Last reviewed February 2023. Available at: https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/back-pain. Accessed November 4, 2025.

North American Spine Society (NASS). Diagnosis and treatment of degenerative lumbar spondylolisthesis. 2nd edition. 2014. Available at:
https://www.spine.org/Portals/0/Assets/Downloads/ResearchClinicalCare/Guidelines/Spondylolisthesis.pdf. Accessed October 30, 2025.

North American Spine Society (NASS). Diagnosis and treatment of low back pain. 2020. Available at:
https://www.spine.org/Portals/0/assets/downloads/ResearchClinicalCare/Guidelines/LowBackPain.pdf. Accessed October 30, 2025.

Nunley PD, Sielatycki JA, Humphreys SC, et al. Total joint replacement of the lumbar spine: 12-month pain and functional outcomes from an investigational device exemption clinical trial. Int J Spine Surg. 2025 Oct 21:8809.

Pham MH, Mehta VA, Patel NN, et al. Complications associated with the Dynesys dynamic stabilization system: a comprehensive review of the literature. Neurosurg Focus. 2016 Jan;40(1):E2.

Pinter ZW, Freedman BA, Nassr A, et al.; TOPS Study Group. A prospective study of lumbar facet arthroplasty in the treatment of degenerative spondylolisthesis and stenosis: results from the Total Posterior Spine System (TOPS) IDE study. Clin Spine Surg. 2023 Mar 1;36(2):E59-E69.

Policy History/Revision Information

Date	Summary of Changes
04/01/2026	**Related Policies** • Added reference link to the Medical Policy titled *Interspinous Fusion and Decompression Devices*

Date	Summary of Changes

	Coverage Rationale
	• Revised list of unproven and not medically necessary indications:
	  ○ Added "vertebral joint implants that replace the disc and facet joints (e.g., MOTUS) for the treatment of spine pain"
	  ○ Replaced:
	  ▪ "Dynamic Stabilization systems for the treatment *of degenerative Spondylolisthesis*" with "Dynamic Stabilization systems for the treatment *of spine pain*"
	  ▪ "Isolated Facet Joint Fusion, with or without instrumentation" with "Isolated Facet Joint Fusion, with or without instrumentation, *for the treatment of spine pain*"
	  ▪ "*Total* Facet Joint *Arthroplasty*" with "Facet Joint *Replacement for treatment of spine pain*"
	Definitions
	• Added definition of "Facet Joint Replacement"
	• Removed definition of:
	  ○ Disabling Symptoms
	  ○ Lumbar Spinal Stenosis (LSS)
	  ○ Progressive
	  ○ Radicular Pain
	  ○ Spinal Fusion
	  ○ Spondylolisthesis
	  ○ Spondylolysis
	  ○ Total Facet Arthroplasty
	  ○ Unremitting
	• Updated definition of:
	  ○ Dynamic Stabilization
	  ○ Isolated Facet Joint Fusion
	  ○ Staged Multiple Sessions
	Applicable Codes
	• Removed CPT codes 63170, 63172, 63173, 63185, 63190, 63191, 63197, 63200, 63250, 63251, 63252, and 63265
	Supporting Information
	• Updated *Description of Services*, *Clinical Evidence*, *FDA*, and *References* sections to reflect the most current information
	• Archived previous policy version 2026T0639H

Instructions for Use

This Medical Policy provides assistance in interpreting UnitedHealthcare standard benefit plans. When deciding coverage, the member specific benefit plan document must be referenced as the terms of the member specific benefit plan may differ from the standard plan. In the event of a conflict, the member specific benefit plan document governs. Before using this policy, check the member specific benefit plan document and any applicable federal or state mandates. UnitedHealthcare reserves the right to modify its Policies and Guidelines as necessary. This Medical Policy is provided for informational purposes. It does not constitute medical advice.

This Medical Policy may also be applied to Medicare Advantage plans in certain instances. In the absence of a Medicare National Coverage Determination (NCD), Local Coverage Determination (LCD), or other Medicare coverage guidance, CMS allows a Medicare Advantage Organization (MAO) to create its own coverage determinations, using objective evidence-based rationale relying on authoritative evidence (Medicare IOM Pub. No. 100-16, Ch. 4, §90.5).

UnitedHealthcare may also use tools developed by third parties, such as the InterQual® criteria, to assist us in administering health benefits. UnitedHealthcare Medical Policies are intended to be used in connection with the independent professional medical judgment of a qualified health care provider and do not constitute the practice of medicine or medical advice.