

# Treatment of Extreme Obesity

**Policy Number:** BIP115.L  
**Effective Date:** July 1, 2023

[➔ Instructions for Use](#)

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- | Related Benefit Interpretation Policies  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Preventive Care Services</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Weight Gain or Weight Loss Programs</a></li> </ul>  |
| Related Medical Management Guidelines  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Bariatric Surgery</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Panniculectomy and Body Contouring Procedures</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Preventive Care Services</a></li> </ul> |

## Federal/State Mandated Regulations

None

## State Market Plan Enhancements

None.

## Covered Benefits

**Important Note:** Covered benefits are listed in *Federal/State Mandated Regulations*, *State Market Plan Enhancements*, and *Covered Benefits* sections. Always refer to the *Federal/State Mandated Regulations* and *State Market Plan Enhancements* sections for additional covered services/benefits not listed in this section.

Refer to the member’s SOB (Schedule of Benefits)/EOC (Explanation of Coverage) to determine if member has a supplemental prescription benefit or contact the Customer Service Department for specific coverage benefit requirements, limitations, and copayment information of this benefit.

Surgical treatments for extreme obesity and services related to this surgery are subject to prior approval by UnitedHealthcare’s Medical Director or designee.

Medication that is prior authorized as medically necessary for the treatment of extreme obesity.

Refer to the Benefit Interpretation Policy titled [Weight Gain or Weight Loss Programs](#) for coverage information for self-injectable weight loss medications

Revisional Bariatric Surgery is covered under the plan when medically necessary due to a technical failure or major complication.

Refer to the Medical Management Guidelines titled [Bariatric Surgery](#) and [Panniculectomy and Body Contouring Procedures](#) for specific criteria.

## Not Covered

- Procedures that are unproven and not medically necessary for treating morbid obesity. Refer to the Medical Management Guideline titled [Bariatric Surgery](#). Supplemented fasting as an alternate to bariatric surgery in an extremely obese member or as a general treatment for extreme obesity.
- Nutritional liquid supplements.
- Weight reduction medications, including diet pills, unless otherwise covered under the supplemental prescription benefit and prior authorized as medically necessary to treat extreme-obesity or as listed in the Benefit Interpretation Policy titled [Weight Gain or Weight Loss Programs](#).
- If there is no apparent medical or surgical complication and approval is not received by a UnitedHealthcare medical director or his/her designee, **Revisional bariatric surgery will not be covered** even if the member meets all criteria that would have allowed coverage if the request were for a primary bariatric surgery.
  - Medical or surgical complications do not include and coverage will not be provided for situations such as but not limited to:
    - Revisional bariatric surgery for revision due to the member's failure to lose weight when there is no apparent medical or surgical complication;
    - The failure to lose weight or the re-gaining of weight following initial weight loss unless an apparent medical or surgical complication is present;
    - The failure to lose weight even if the member has complied with nutrition, exercise and counseling protocols where there is no medical or surgical complication;
    - For the revision of a primary bariatric surgery that failed due to dilation of the gastric pouch even if the primary procedure was successful in inducing weight loss prior to pouch dilation; or
    - For the conversion to a roux en-y gastric bypass even when the member has not had adequate successful weight loss within two years following a primary bariatric procedure
  - Enhancement medications when prescribed for the following non-medical conditions are not covered: weight loss, hair growth, sexual performance, athletic performance, cosmetic purposes, anti-aging for cosmetic purposes, and mental performance. Examples of drugs that are excluded when prescribed for such conditions include, but are not limited to, Penlac<sup>®</sup>, Retin-A<sup>®</sup>, Renova<sup>®</sup>, Vaniqa<sup>®</sup>, Propecia<sup>®</sup>, Lustra<sup>®</sup>, Xenical<sup>®</sup>, or Meridia<sup>®</sup>.

(This exclusion does not exclude coverage for drugs when prior authorized as Medically Necessary to treat Extreme Obesity or diagnosed medical conditions affecting memory, including but not limited to, Alzheimer's dementia.)

## Policy History/Revision Information

Date	Summary of Changes
07/01/2023	<p><b>State Market Plan Enhancements</b> <b>Large and Small Groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removed language indicating:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bariatric surgical procedures are covered when medically necessary and prior authorized:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [UnitedHealthcare] will use evidence-based criteria to determine coverage of bariatric surgery, such as the most recent National Institutes of Health (NIH) guidelines, in determining the medical necessity of requests for surgical treatment for morbid obesity</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Refer to your schedule of benefits for copayment/deductible information of this benefit, or you may call our customer service department for additional information</li> <li>○ Bariatric surgery will only be covered when medically necessary for the treatment of morbid obesity:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [UnitedHealthcare] will use evidence-based criteria to determine coverage of bariatric surgery, such as the most recent National Institutes of Health (NIH) guidelines, in determining the medical necessity of requests for surgical treatment for morbid obesity</li> <li>• UnitedHealthcare evaluation encourages a multidisciplinary team approach that includes medical, surgical, psychological, and nutritional expertise for those who are seeking surgical weight-loss</li> <li>▪ After surgery, the member takes part in a multidisciplinary program of diet, exercise, and behavior modification</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Date	Summary of Changes
	<p><b>Covered Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clarified instruction to refer to the Benefit Interpretation Policy titled <i>Weight Gain or Weight Loss Programs for coverage information for self-injectable weight loss medications</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Not Covered</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revised list of non-covered services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Added “procedures that are unproven and not medically necessary for treating obesity; refer to the Medical Management Guideline titled <i>Bariatric Surgery</i>”</li> <li>○ Removed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Revisional bariatric surgery for any other indication than those listed as proven in the Medical Management Guideline titled <i>Bariatric Surgery</i></li> <li>▪ Bariatric surgery as the primary treatment for any condition other than obesity</li> <li>▪ Bariatric interventions for the treatment of obesity</li> <li>▪ Gastrointestinal liners (EndoBarrier®) are investigational, unproven, and not medically necessary for treating obesity due to lack of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval, and insufficient evidence of efficacy</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Replaced “weight reduction medications, including diet pills, unless otherwise covered under the supplemental prescription benefit and prior authorized as medically necessary to treat extreme obesity” with “weight reduction medications, including diet pills, unless otherwise covered under the supplemental prescription benefit and prior authorized as medically necessary to treat Extreme Obesity or as listed in the Benefit Interpretation Policy titled <b>Weight Gain or Weight Loss Programs</b>”</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Supporting Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Removed <i>Definitions</i> and <i>References</i> sections</li> <li>● Archived previous policy version BIP115.K</li> </ul>

## Instructions for Use

Covered benefits are listed in three (3) sections: *Federal/State Mandated Regulations*, *State Market Plan Enhancements*, and *Covered Benefits*. All services must be medically necessary. Each benefit plan contains its own specific provisions for coverage, limitations, and exclusions as stated in the member’s Evidence of Coverage (EOC)/Schedule of Benefits (SOB). If there is a discrepancy between this policy and the member’s EOC/SOB, the member’s EOC/SOB provision will govern.