

Morbid Obesity

A LIFEWISE DOCUMENTATION AND CODING SERIES FOR PROVIDERS

Overview

Morbid obesity is a serious condition. Symptoms build slowly over time and interfere with basic physical functions such as breathing and walking. Morbid obesity is associated with a shorter life expectancy and serious health consequences in the form of co-morbid conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and obstructive sleep apnea.

Often providers are reluctant to document obesity as “morbid” or “severe” for fear of offending patients. Patients, however, need to understand that obesity is a serious condition that can affect their overall health. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines adult overweight and obesity as:

- Morbid or severe obesity: Body Mass Index (BMI) ≥ 40 Kg/m² and a BMI ≥ 35 , if a patient has one or more co-morbid conditions that can be linked to obesity such as high blood pressure or diabetes
- Obesity: BMI 30 Kg/m² or greater
- Overweight: 25 – 29.9 Kg/m²

Documentation

Documentation of “morbid obesity,” as opposed to “obesity” or “overweight,” is essential for selecting the diagnosis code that accurately represents the patient’s condition. For example, when a provider documents “overweight” or “obese/obesity,” but a patient has a BMI of 40 or above (indicating morbid obesity), the provider/coder must defer to the documented verbiage and not to the BMI value when assigning a code for the associated condition. In this case, the coder must select the diagnosis code for “overweight” or “obese/obesity”. However, the diagnosis code for a BMI of 40 or above should still be reported even if inconsistent with a documented diagnosis of “overweight” or “obese/obesity”. The example below illustrates this concept:

Documentation example	Incomplete code assignment	Correct code assignment
Vitals: BMI 41.2 Assessment & Plan: Obesity – adopt low calorie and diet and initiate vigorous exercise regime	E66.9: Obesity, unspecified	E66.9: Obesity, unspecified Z68.41: Body mass index [BMI] 40.0-44.9 While these diagnoses are inconsistent with one another, the provider has addressed the obesity; this provides the support necessary to report the BMI code.

When reviewing morbid obesity with your patient, be sure to document the following:

- The diagnosis of morbid obesity or severe obesity
- Evaluation and/or treatment plan, such as weight loss, diet, exercise, and/or referral to a nutritionist
- BMI may be automatically calculated and documented by the electronic Medical Record or by a healthcare professional other than a physician, such as a dietitian

Coding

When coding morbid obesity:

- First assign an ICD-10 code for morbid obesity:
 - E66.01, Morbid (severe) obesity due to excess calories
- Then choose an appropriate code for patient's BMI:
 - Z68.35 – Z68.39, Body Mass Index (BMI) 35-39, adult
 - Z68.40 – Z68.45, Body Mass Index (BMI) 40 or greater, adult
- Code co-morbid conditions (e.g.; hypertension or diabetes) if the provider addressed them during the face-to-face visit and documented them in the patient's medical record

Helpful Tips

- You can find an online BMI calculator at: <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>
- For more information about coding morbid obesity, contact your Quality and Risk Adjustment Provider Clinical Consultant.