



CPT contains numerous codes for removal of skin lesions. Understanding how the codes are organized and how CPT defines removal methods is essential to finding the right code.

Excision is defined as full-thickness removal and includes local anesthesia and simple closure of the resulting defect. Each excised lesion is reported separately. In some cases, coding must wait for the pathology report in order to assign the correct code.

- Benign lesions (11400-11471)
- Malignant lesions (11600-11646)

If intermediate or complex closure is required in order to repair the defect, report codes 12031-12057 or 13100-13153 in addition to the excision code.

Destruction is defined as ablation of benign, pre-malignant, or malignant tissue, with or without curettement, and includes local anesthesia.

- Benign or pre-malignant lesions (17000-172500)
- Malignant lesions (17260-17286)

Shaving is removal of the entire lesion, usually by horizontal slicing without a full-thickness excision, and includes local anesthesia and cauterization.

- Epidermal or dermal lesions (11300-11313)
- Corns, calluses (11055-11057)

Biopsy is removal of part of a lesion for testing and diagnosis. Biopsies are reported using 11000 for the first lesion and 11101 for each additional lesion.

For excisions, code selection is determined first by the site of the lesion (CPT groups multiple sites under a single code) and then by size. Most of the codes for skin lesion removal are located in the Integumentary section of CPT—but not all. Lesions of the male or female genitalia are reported using codes from chapter 54000.

TIPS

- Many physicians guess at the size of the lesion, but keep in mind that 1 cm can make a huge difference in reimbursement. Code selection is based on the diameter of the lesion *plus* the margins of skin removed. Measurement is made prior to excision.
- If multiple lesions are removed from the same site (according to CPT groupings), list the most extensive code first, and append modifier 51 to each additional procedure code. Use modifier 59 if lesions are removed from different sites.
- Do not use the lesion removal codes for skin tags. Codes 11200-11201 have been designated for skin tags.



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