

# CPT® 28297 Versus CPT® 28740

The author clarifies the confusion surrounding this code selection.

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**CPT 28297**—Correction, hallux valgus (bunionectomy), with sesamoidectomy, when performed; with first metatarsal and medial cuneiform joint arthrodosis, any method

**CPT 28740**—Arthrodosis, midtarsal or tarsometatarsal, single joint

When a first metatarsocuneiform joint arthrodosis is performed by any method in combination with resection of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head, the single appropriate CPT code is CPT 28297. When a first metatarsocuneiform joint arthrodosis is performed by any method without resection of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head, the single appropriate code is CPT 28740.

There is only one official, recognized listing of CPT codes and it is the CPT Professional Book. Pages 198-199 of the 2021 CPT Professional Book describe CPT 28297 as including removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head and arthrodosis of the first metatarsocuneiform joint. The figure on page 199 of the 2021 CPT Professional Book demonstrates that removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head and arthrodosis of the first metatarsocuneiform are both included in CPT 28297.

For some, confusion exists surrounding the selection of CPT 28740 versus CPT 28297 due to different interpretations of the word “bunionectomy” and the fact that most clinicians define it one way, while the CPT Editorial Panel defines it differently. Most clinicians agree a “bunionectomy” (clinically speaking) has been performed when an increased

first intermetatarsal angle has been reduced, the poorly positioned hallux (big toe) has been straightened, and the patient no longer has an enlarged area of bony prominence on the medial aspect side of their first metatarsophalangeal joint. With this described result, clinically speaking, the bunion has been repaired, and most clinicians refer to what was performed as a “bunionectomy”.

However, the CPT Editorial Panel states that any “bunionectomy” must include resection of the medial em-

not removed. Therefore, the appropriate coding of the above described procedure is CPT 28740.

For some, confusion exists regarding the selection of the appropriate CPT code when a first metatarsocuneiform joint arthrodosis is performed by any method without resection of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head due to this CPT definition of “bunionectomy”. This has been amplified in the last couple of years with an increasing utilization of procedures that result in repair of

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inence of the first metatarsal head. When the bunionectomy CPT codes were revised during the 2016 AMA CPT Editorial Panel meetings, this was discussed. According to CPT, in order to report any “bunionectomy” code, the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head must be removed. Therefore, if a procedure is performed which includes a first metatarsocuneiform joint fusion without resection of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head, even though it reduces an elevated first intermetatarsal angle, straightens the hallux, eliminates bony prominence at the medial aspect of the first metatarsophalangeal joint, and clinically removes a bunion, this is not considered a “bunionectomy” by CPT because the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head was

a bunion deformity without the need to remove the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head. When most providers who are currently in practice did their surgical training, all or most procedures aimed at repairing bunion deformities included removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head. These providers are accustomed to using the “bunionectomy” CPT codes whenever performing a procedure that results in the repair of a bunion deformity. However, it is important to note that switching to a procedure that does not include removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head mandates switching the CPT code as well.

Beyond the CPT Professional Book, there are additional, official American

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Medical Association CPT resources that reinforce what is described above. A December 2016 CPT Assistant newsletter explains that removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head must be included in any proce-

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cedure coded as a “bunionectomy.” The direct quote copied from that newsletter states, “Code 28297 includes the removal of prominent or hypertrophied bone from the medial aspect of the first metatarsal head.”

Further guidance can be found in the AMA Relative Value Update

Committee (RUC) database. The clinical vignettes listed in the AMA RUC database include all steps typically associated with a CPT code. The intra-service portion of CPT 28297 described in the AMA RUC database includes the sentence, “The medial eminence is excised.” While this alone does not establish removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head as a requirement of using a “bunionectomy” CPT code, it does support CPT guidance in listing removal of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal as a typical component of the procedure described by CPT 28297.

Page xiv of the 2021 CPT Professional Book states that a CPT code should be selected based only on “the name of the procedure or service that accurately identifies the service performed.” With this sentence as a reference, the diagnosis plays no role in the selection of the CPT code. Rather, the CPT code is selected based only on the procedure that was performed. Furthermore, CPT instruction includes the direction to “not select a CPT code that merely approximates the service provided.” When all of the steps included in CPT 28297 are performed, except resection of the medial eminence of the first metatarsal head, choosing CPT 28297 would be choosing a CPT code that “merely approximates” the procedure that was performed and would, therefore, be incorrect coding because the descriptor of CPT 28297 includes “bunionectomy.” **PM**

## Reference

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