

MEDICAL POLICY

POLICY TITLE	KNEE BRACES
POLICY NUMBER	MP 6.012

CLINICAL BENEFIT	<input type="checkbox"/> MINIMIZE SAFETY RISK OR CONCERN. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MINIMIZE HARMFUL OR INEFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS. <input type="checkbox"/> ASSURE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF CARE. <input type="checkbox"/> ASSURE APPROPRIATE DURATION OF SERVICE FOR INTERVENTIONS. <input type="checkbox"/> ASSURE THAT RECOMMENDED MEDICAL PREREQUISITES HAVE BEEN MET. <input type="checkbox"/> ASSURE APPROPRIATE SITE OF TREATMENT OR SERVICE.
Effective Date:	7/1/2025

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I. POLICY

Custom-made *unloader* knee braces may be considered **medically necessary** in the treatment of patients with painful osteoarthritis involving the medial compartment of the knee.

Off-the-shelf (custom-fitted) functional knee braces may be considered **medically necessary** in patients with knee instability due to injury (including patients who have had surgery for the injury) or in patients with painful osteoarthritis of the medial compartment of the knee.

Custom-made functional knee braces are considered **investigational** as there is insufficient evidence to support a general conclusion regarding the health outcomes or benefits associated with this item.

Prophylactic knee braces are considered **investigational** as there is insufficient evidence to support a general conclusion regarding the health outcomes or benefits associated with this item.

Note: The provider requesting/ordering the DME should be a provider with whom the member has established a relationship and is involved in the ongoing care of the member and the condition for which the DME/orthotic is prescribed.

Cross-Reference:

MP 6.062 Ankle-Foot and Knee-Ankle-Foot Orthoses

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II. PRODUCT VARIATIONS

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This policy is only applicable to certain programs and products administered by Capital BlueCross and subject to benefit variations as discussed in Section VI. Please see additional information below.

FEP PPO - Refer to FEP Medical Policy Manual. The FEP Medical Policy manual can be found at: <https://www.fepblue.org/benefit-plans/medical-policies-and-utilization-management-guidelines/medical-policies>.

III. DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND

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Knee braces may be custom made or available off-the-shelf in a variety of sizes. Knee braces may be intended for rehabilitation, to reduce pain, or to prevent injury in either stable or unstable knees.

Knee braces typically consist of 3 components: a superstructure (usually a rigid shell), a hinge, and a strap system. The superstructure extends proximally and distally to a hinge centered around the knee axis of motion. The strapping system secures the brace to the limb. Knee braces can be subdivided into 4 categories that are based on their intended use:

- Prophylactic braces are those that attempt to prevent or reduce the severity of knee ligament injuries. These braces are primarily designed to prevent injuries to the medial collateral ligament, which is the area of the most common athletic knee injuries.
- Rehabilitation braces are designed to allow protected motion of injured knees that have been treated operatively or non-operatively. These braces allow for controlled joint motion and typically consist of hinges that can be locked into place to limit range of motion. Rehabilitation braces are commonly used for 6 to 12 weeks after an injury. Rehabilitation braces are usually purchased off-the-shelf and not custom-made.
- Functional braces are designed to assist or provide stability for unstable knees during activities of daily living (ADL) or sports and may be either off-the-shelf or custom made. Derotation braces are typically used after injuries to ligaments and have medial and lateral bars with varying hinge and strap designs. These derotation braces are designed to permit significant motion and speed; in many instances, the braces are worn only during elective activities, such as sports. Braces made of graphite, titanium, or other lightweight materials are specifically designed for high-performance sports allowing them to be worn during elective high-performance sports activities. Functional knee braces have also been used in patients with osteoarthritis to help decrease the weight on painful joints.
- Unloader knee braces are specifically designed to reduce the pain and disability associated with osteoarthritis of the medial compartment of the knee by bracing the knee in the valgus position to unload the compressive forces on the medial compartment.

IV. RATIONALE

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SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

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Evidence of efficacy is limited for off-the-shelf bracing for osteoarthritis, ligamentous instability, or patellofemoral pain.

V. DEFINITIONS

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BASIC ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING include and are limited to walking in the home, eating, bathing, dressing, and homemaking.

CUSTOM-MADE BRACE describes a brace that is made according to precise measurements or molds/casts of an individual patient. Thus, this type of a brace can only be worn by the individual patient for whom it was customized. A custom-fabricated or molded-to-patient- model is often referred to as a customized brace.

OFF-THE-SHELF BRACE refers to a brace that is obtained from a selection of readily available braces. Most often, simple adjustments are made to ensure proper fit.

VI. DISCLAIMER

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Capital Blue Cross' medical policies are used to determine coverage for specific medical technologies, procedures, equipment, and services. These medical policies do not constitute medical advice and are subject to change as required by law or applicable clinical evidence from independent treatment guidelines. Treating providers are solely responsible for medical advice and treatment of members. These policies are not a guarantee of coverage or payment. Payment of claims is subject to a determination regarding the member's benefit program and eligibility on the date of service, and a determination that the services are medically necessary and appropriate. Final processing of a claim is based upon the terms of contract that applies to the members' benefit program, including benefit limitations and exclusions. If a provider or a member has a question concerning this medical policy, please contact Capital Blue Cross' Provider Services or Member Services.

VII. CODING INFORMATION

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Note: This list of codes may not be all-inclusive, and codes are subject to change at any time. The identification of a code in this section does not denote coverage as coverage is determined by the terms of member benefit information. In addition, not all covered services are eligible for separate reimbursement.

Custom-made functional and *prophylactic* knee braces are considered investigational:

Procedure Codes							
L1834	L1840	L1846					

Custom made unloader knee braces are covered when medically necessary for painful osteoarthritis:

Procedure Codes

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Procedure Codes							
L1844							

ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Code*	Description
M17.0	Bilateral primary osteoarthritis of knee
M17.11	Unilateral primary osteoarthritis, right knee
M17.12	Unilateral primary osteoarthritis, left knee
M17.2	Bilateral post-traumatic osteoarthritis of knee
M17.31	Unilateral post-traumatic osteoarthritis, right knee
M17.32	Unilateral post-traumatic osteoarthritis, left knee
M17.4	Other bilateral secondary osteoarthritis of knee
M17.5	Other unilateral secondary osteoarthritis of knee

Prefabricated/off-the-shelf custom fitted knee braces are covered when medically necessary:

Procedure Codes							
L1810	L1812	L1820	L1830	L1831	L1832	L1833	L1836
L1843	L1845	L1847	L1848	L1850	L1851	L1852	L1821

ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes*	Description
M17.0	Bilateral primary osteoarthritis of knee
M17.0	Bilateral primary osteoarthritis of knee
M17.11	Unilateral primary osteoarthritis, right knee
M17.12	Unilateral primary osteoarthritis, left knee
M17.2	Bilateral post-traumatic osteoarthritis of knee
M17.31	Unilateral post-traumatic osteoarthritis, right knee
M17.32	Unilateral post-traumatic osteoarthritis, left knee
M17.4	Other bilateral secondary osteoarthritis of knee
M17.5	Other unilateral secondary osteoarthritis of knee
M22.01	Recurrent dislocation of patella, right knee
M22.02	Recurrent dislocation of patella, left knee
M22.11	Recurrent subluxation of patella, right knee
M22.12	Recurrent subluxation of patella, left knee

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ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes*	Description
M22.2X1	Patellofemoral disorders, right knee
M22.2X2	Patellofemoral disorders, left knee
M22.41	Chondromalacia patellae, right knee
M22.42	Chondromalacia patellae, left knee
M23.200	Derangement of unspecified lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.201	Derangement of unspecified lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.203	Derangement of unspecified medial meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.204	Derangement of unspecified medial meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.206	Derangement of unspecified meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.207	Derangement of unspecified meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.221	Derangement of posterior horn of medial meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.222	Derangement of posterior horn of medial meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.231	Derangement of other medial meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.232	Derangement of other medial meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.241	Derangement of anterior horn of lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.242	Derangement of anterior horn of lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.251	Derangement of posterior horn of lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.252	Derangement of posterior horn of lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.261	Derangement of other lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, right knee
M23.262	Derangement of other lateral meniscus due to old tear or injury, left knee
M23.300	Other meniscus derangements, unspecified lateral meniscus, right knee
M23.301	Other meniscus derangements, unspecified lateral meniscus, left knee
M23.303	Other meniscus derangements, unspecified medial meniscus, right knee
M23.304	Other meniscus derangements, unspecified medial meniscus, left knee
M23.306	Other meniscus derangements, unspecified meniscus, right knee
M23.307	Other meniscus derangements, unspecified meniscus, left knee
M23.321	Other meniscus derangements, posterior horn of medial meniscus, right knee
M23.322	Other meniscus derangements, posterior horn of medial meniscus, left knee
M23.331	Other meniscus derangements, other medial meniscus, right knee
M23.332	Other meniscus derangements, other medial meniscus, left knee
M23.341	Other meniscus derangements, anterior horn of lateral meniscus, right knee
M23.342	Other meniscus derangements, anterior horn of lateral meniscus, left knee
M23.351	Other meniscus derangements, posterior horn of lateral meniscus, right knee

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ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes*	Description
M23.352	Other meniscus derangements, posterior horn of lateral meniscus, left knee
M23.361	Other meniscus derangements, other lateral meniscus, right knee
M23.362	Other meniscus derangements, other lateral meniscus, left knee
M23.41	Loose body in knee, right knee
M23.42	Loose body in knee, left knee
M23.51	Chronic instability of knee, right knee
M23.52	Chronic instability of knee, left knee
M23.611	Other spontaneous disruption of anterior cruciate ligament of right knee
M23.612	Other spontaneous disruption of anterior cruciate ligament of left knee
M23.621	Other spontaneous disruption of posterior cruciate ligament of right knee
M23.622	Other spontaneous disruption of posterior cruciate ligament of left knee
M23.631	Other spontaneous disruption of medial collateral ligament of right knee
M23.632	Other spontaneous disruption of medial collateral ligament of left knee
M23.641	Other spontaneous disruption of lateral collateral ligament of right knee
M23.642	Other spontaneous disruption of lateral collateral ligament of left knee
M23.671	Other spontaneous disruption of capsular ligament of right knee
M23.672	Other spontaneous disruption of capsular ligament of left knee
M23.8X1	Other internal derangements of right knee
M23.8X2	Other internal derangements of left knee
M25.261	Flail joint, right knee
M25.262	Flail joint, left knee
M25.361	Other instability, right knee
M25.362	Other instability, left knee
S82.011A	Displaced osteochondral fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.012A	Displaced osteochondral fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.014A	Nondisplaced osteochondral fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.015A	Nondisplaced osteochondral fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.016A	Nondisplaced osteochondral fracture of unspecified patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.021A	Displaced longitudinal fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.022A	Displaced longitudinal fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.024A	Nondisplaced longitudinal fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.025A	Nondisplaced longitudinal fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture

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ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes*	Description
S82.031A	Displaced transverse fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.032A	Displaced transverse fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.034A	Nondisplaced transverse fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.035A	Nondisplaced transverse fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.041A	Displaced comminuted fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.042A	Displaced comminuted fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.044A	Nondisplaced comminuted fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.045A	Nondisplaced comminuted fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.091A	Other fracture of right patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S82.092A	Other fracture of left patella, initial encounter for closed fracture
S83.011A	Lateral subluxation of right patella, initial encounter
S83.012A	Lateral subluxation of left patella, initial encounter
S83.014A	Lateral dislocation of right patella, initial encounter
S83.015A	Lateral dislocation of left patella, initial encounter
S83.091A	Other subluxation of right patella, initial encounter
S83.092A	Other subluxation of left patella, initial encounter
S83.094A	Other dislocation of right patella, initial encounter
S83.095A	Other dislocation of left patella, initial encounter
S83.111A	Anterior subluxation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.112A	Anterior subluxation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.114A	Anterior dislocation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.115A	Anterior dislocation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.121A	Posterior subluxation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.122A	Posterior subluxation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.124A	Posterior dislocation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.125A	Posterior dislocation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.131A	Medial subluxation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.132A	Medial subluxation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.134A	Medial dislocation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.135A	Medial dislocation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.141A	Lateral subluxation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.142A	Lateral subluxation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter
S83.144A	Lateral dislocation of proximal end of tibia, right knee, initial encounter
S83.145A	Lateral dislocation of proximal end of tibia, left knee, initial encounter

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ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes*	Description
S83.191A	Other subluxation of right knee, initial encounter
S83.192A	Other subluxation of left knee, initial encounter
S83.194A	Other dislocation of right knee, initial encounter
S83.195A	Other dislocation of left knee, initial encounter
S83.211A	Bucket-handle tear of medial meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.212A	Bucket-handle tear of medial meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.221A	Peripheral tear of medial meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.222A	Peripheral tear of medial meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.231A	Complex tear of medial meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.232A	Complex tear of medial meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.241A	Other tear of medial meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.242A	Other tear of medial meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.251A	Bucket-handle tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.252A	Bucket-handle tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.261A	Peripheral tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.262A	Peripheral tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.271A	Complex tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.272A	Complex tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.281A	Other tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, right knee, initial encounter
S83.282A	Other tear of lateral meniscus, current injury, left knee, initial encounter
S83.411A	Sprain of medial collateral ligament of right knee, initial encounter
S83.412A	Sprain of medial collateral ligament of left knee, initial encounter
S83.421A	Sprain of lateral collateral ligament of right knee, initial encounter
S83.422A	Sprain of lateral collateral ligament of left knee, initial encounter
S83.501A	Sprain of unspecified cruciate ligament of right knee, initial encounter
S83.502A	Sprain of unspecified cruciate ligament of left knee, initial encounter
S83.511A	Sprain of anterior cruciate ligament of right knee, initial encounter
S83.512A	Sprain of anterior cruciate ligament of left knee, initial encounter
S83.521A	Sprain of posterior cruciate ligament of right knee, initial encounter
S83.522A	Sprain of posterior cruciate ligament of left knee, initial encounter
S83.61XA	Sprain of the superior tibiofibular joint and ligament, right knee, initial encounter
S83.62XA	Sprain of the superior tibiofibular joint and ligament, left knee, initial encounter
S83.8X1A	Sprain of other specified parts of right knee, initial encounter
S83.8X2A	Sprain of other specified parts of left knee, initial encounter
T84.012A	Broken internal right knee prosthesis

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ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes*	Description
T84.013A	Broken internal left knee prosthesis
T84.022A	Instability of internal right knee prosthesis
T84.023A	Instability of internal left knee prosthesis
T84.032A	Mechanical loosening of internal right knee prosthetic joint
T84.033A	Mechanical loosening of internal left knee prosthetic joint
Z47.89	Encounter for other orthopedic aftercare

VIII. REFERENCES

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IX. POLICY HISTORY

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MP 6.012	04/22/2020 Consensus Review. No change to policy statements. References reviewed. Language revised under Product Variations, Benefit Variations and Disclaimer sections.
	07/01/2021 Consensus Review. No change to policy statement. References reviewed and updated.
	02/11/2022 Consensus Review. No change to policy statement. Cross reference added. Product Variations updated.
	12/08/2023 Consensus Review. No change to policy statement. Rationale, Definitions and References updated.
	09/18/2024 Administrative Update. New code L1821 added effective 10/01/2024.
	12/19/2024 Minor Review. Removed individual consideration criteria from Custom-made functional knee braces. References updated.
	06/04/2025 Administrative Update. Removing the Benefit Variations and updating the Disclaimer.

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