

Eli's Rehab Report

Reader Question: Tendon Injections Differ From TPIs

Question: What are the differences among the codes in the [CPT 20550 - CPT 20553](#) series? I know the description of 20551 is "Injection(s); tendon origin/insertion," but I'm not sure how that differs from the tendon sheath injection (20550) or the trigger point injections (20552-20553).

Virginia Subscriber

Answer: A tendon is the fibrous collagen cord that attaches the muscle to bones or other structures. A synovial sheath may surround portions of a tendon. Tendon inflammation within the sheath causes pain or a decrease in joint mobility. A trigger finger (727.03) injection qualifies as a tendon sheath injection, and you should report it by reporting 20550* (Injection[s]; tendon sheath, ligament).

Ligaments cross over joints. A steroid injection into the medial collateral ligament of the knee is an example of a ligament injection (also coded as 20550).

A tendon origin is where the muscle attaches proximally, and a tendon insertion is where the muscle attaches distally. For example, the gastrocnemius muscle's origin is the femur's distal end, and its insertion is the proximal end of the ankle's calcaneus bone. The physiatrist might inject the origin of the extensor muscle group to treat lateral epicondylitis (726.32, Tennis elbow). You should report 20551 (Injection[s]; tendon origin/insertion) for this procedure.

A trigger point is a hyperirritable tender spot in a muscle that "triggers" pain to other muscles. This is why neck muscles often cause head pain. These spots are usually in the muscle and its lining (fascia), and are also called "myofascial" trigger points. Physiatrists often inject anesthetic medication into the triggering muscle to treat trigger points.

Depending on how many muscles you inject, you should report one unit of either 20552 (Injection[s]; single or multiple trigger point[s], one or two muscle[s]) or 20553 (... single or multiple trigger point[s]; three or more muscles) for trigger point injections.