



MEDICAL COVERAGE GUIDELINES  
SECTION: SURGERY

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## SURGERY FOR ATHLETIC PUBALGIA

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Coverage for services, procedures, medical devices and drugs are dependent upon benefit eligibility as outlined in the member's specific benefit plan. This Medical Coverage Guideline must be read in its entirety to determine coverage eligibility, if any.

The section identified as "Description" defines or describes a service, procedure, medical device or drug and is in no way intended as a statement of medical necessity and/or coverage.

The section identified as "Criteria" defines criteria to determine whether a service, procedure, medical device or drug is considered medically necessary or experimental or investigational.

State or federal mandates, e.g., FEP program, may dictate that any drug, device or biological product approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may not be considered experimental or investigational and thus the drug, device or biological product may be assessed only on the basis of medical necessity.

Medical Coverage Guidelines are subject to change as new information becomes available.

For purposes of this Medical Coverage Guideline, the terms "experimental" and "investigational" are considered to be interchangeable.

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### Description:

Athletic pubalgia is a poorly defined condition, for which there is not a consensus regarding the cause and/or treatment. Athletic pubalgia, commonly known as sports hernia, is characterized by disabling activity-dependent lower abdominal and groin pain that is not attributable to any other cause. Athletic pubalgia is most frequently diagnosed in high-performance male athletes, particularly those who participate in sports that involve rapid twisting and turning such as soccer, hockey, and football. Alternative names include Gilmore groin, osteitis pubis, pubic inguinal pain syndrome, inguinal disruption, slap shot gut, sportsmen groin, footballers groin injury complex, hockey groin syndrome, athletic hernia, sports hernia and core muscle injury.

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## **SURGERY FOR ATHLETIC PUBALGIA (cont.)**

### **Description:** (cont.)

Theories as to the cause of athletic pubalgia include:

- It is an occult hernia process, a prehernia condition or an incipient hernia, with the major abnormality being a defect in the transversalis fascia, which forms the posterior wall of the inguinal canal.
- Injury to soft tissues that attach to or cross the pubic symphysis is the primary abnormality. The most common of these injuries is thought to be at the insertion of the rectus abdominis onto the pubis, with either primary or secondary pain arising from the adductor insertion sites onto the pubis. It has been proposed that muscle injury leads to failure of the transversalis fascia, with a resultant formation of a bulge in the posterior wall of the inguinal canal.
- An association with femoroacetabular impingement (FAI). It is believed that if FAI presents with limitations in hip range of motion, compensatory patterns during athletic activity may lead to increased stresses involving the abdominal obliques, distal rectus abdominis, pubic symphysis and adductor musculature. Surgery for athletic pubalgia has been performed concurrently with treatment of FAI, or following FAI surgery if symptoms are not resolved.

There are a variety of surgical procedures used to treat athletic pubalgia, e.g., open or laparoscopic sutured hernia repair. Surgery is typically reserved for individuals who have failed at least 3 months of conservative treatment.

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### **Criteria:**

- Surgical treatment of athletic pubalgia is considered ***experimental or investigational*** based upon:
  1. Insufficient scientific evidence to permit conclusions concerning the effect on health outcomes, and
  2. Insufficient evidence to support improvement of the net health outcome, and
  3. Insufficient evidence to support improvement of the net health outcome as much as, or more than, established alternatives, and
  4. Insufficient evidence to support improvement outside the investigational setting.

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### **Resources:**

1. 7.01.142 BCBS Association Medical Policy Reference Manual. Surgery for Athletic Pubalgia. Issue date 07/10/2014.