

# Outpatient Medical Self-Care Programs

- Clinical Policy Bulletins
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Number: 0169

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## Policy

### Scope of Policy

This Clinical Policy Bulletin addresses outpatient medical self-care programs.

#### 1. Medical Necessity

Aetna considers the following interventions medically necessary:

1. Outpatient medical self-care programs (subject to applicable plan coverage definitions and limitations; please check benefit plan descriptions for details):
  1. Back school for members with chronic back pain who meet criteria in CPB 0232 - Back Pain - Non Invasive Treatments;
  2. Cardiac rehabilitation for members with cardiac disease who meet criteria in CPB 0021 - Cardiac Rehabilitation;
  3. Diabetes education programs for members with diabetes who meet criteria in CPB 0070 - Diabetes Tests, Programs and Supplies;
  4. Pulmonary rehabilitation for members with chronic pulmonary diseases who meet criteria in CPB 0032 - Pulmonary Rehabilitation.

#### 2. Recognized programs

Consideration of coverage will be extended to other self-care programs (subject to plan coverage definitions and limitations; please check benefit plan descriptions) when:

1. The program consists of services provided by recognized health care professionals (e.g., doctors, registered nurses, social workers, physical therapists, dietitians\*, respiratory therapist\*, etc.); *and*
  2. The program is coordinated with Aetna's Patient Management Department (in Aetna network plans); *and*
  3. The program is designed to educate the member about specific conditions and lifestyle changes necessary as a result of the medical condition; *and*
  4. The program is directed and supervised by a physician; *and*
3. The program is prescribed by the attending physician for a member with a medical condition amenable to self-care (e.g., diabetes, chronic back pain, chronic pulmonary disease or cardiac disease).

**Note Frequency and Duration:** The medically necessary frequency and duration of self-care programs varies depending on the goals and objectives of the program. Participation in a self-care program for a particular illness is considered medically necessary once per lifetime unless an additional episode of illness requires another self-care program (e.g., second heart attack).

**\*Services Provided by Dietitians and Respiratory Therapists:** Self-care programs offering services provided by dietitians and respiratory therapists may be covered when required by law or when *all* of the following criteria are met:

- The charges are billed by their doctor or hospital employer; and
- The services are covered under the policy; and

- They are employed by and working under the supervision of a hospital or recognized health care facility, a home health care agency or a qualified doctor; and
- They are licensed, certified or qualified by professional credentials or degree to provide the services.

## 2. Policy Limitations and Exclusions

### 1. Non-covered programs

Coverage is not extended for self-care programs that:

1. Are available to the general public without charge; or
2. Are general health or lifestyle education programs – not related to the member's diagnosis or condition; or
3. Consist of services not generally accepted as necessary and appropriate for management of the disease or injury.

### 2. Work Hardening Programs

Work hardening programs are not considered covered outpatient self-care programs under Aetna medical plans.

**Note:** The primary goal of these programs is return to work, not treatment of a disease or injury. Their purpose is training the individual to work with their current limitations and to be able to function with maximum productivity in their job. This is a form of vocational rehabilitation rather than a covered outpatient self-care program.

## 3. Related Policies

- CPB 0021 - Cardiac Rehabilitation
- CPB 0032 - Pulmonary Rehabilitation
- CPB 0070 - Diabetes Tests, Programs and Supplies
- CPB 0198 - Work Hardening Programs
- CPB 0232 - Back Pain - Non Invasive Treatments
- CPB 0342 - Intestinal Rehabilitation Programs

## Background

Outpatient medical self-care programs refer to programs that focus on self-care activities for management of disease. Self-care programs follow evidence based guidelines, and may refer to diet, exercise, administration of medications, monitoring disease, avoiding activities that exacerbate disease, and obtaining recommended follow-up medical care. Another important part of self-care is being able to recognize the need for medical care.

## References

The above policy is based on the following references:

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## Policy History

- Last Review 04/15/2025

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Next Review: 02/12/2026

- Review History
- Definitions

## Additional Information

- Clinical Policy Bulletin Notes