CPC® Pre-Exam Pocket Review Reference Cards

High-Yield Diagnostic & Guideline Memory Matrix · Precision Coding Press

STUDY AID ONLY — Prohibited as loose reference material inside official AAPC test centers. Follow current AAPC Candidate Handbook rules for approved codebook markings.

CARD 1: MASTER CPT MODIFIERS

Modifier Decision Trees & CMS X-Series Traps

CORE RULE: Check Global Surgery Days Before Appending

• **Mod 25:** Significant, separately identifiable E/M on same day of minor procedure (0 or 10-day global). Must have distinct documentation.

• **Mod 57:** Decision for surgery. Appended to E/M that resulted in decision for **major surgery** (90-day global). Day of or day before.

• **Mod 59 vs CMS X-Series (Distinct Procedure):**
- **XE:** Separate Encounter on the same date.
- **XS:** Separate Structure / distinct organ or site.
- **XP:** Separate Practitioner in same group practice.
- **XU:** Unusual Non-Overlapping service component.

• **Mod 78:** Unplanned return to OR for related procedure during post-op period (Does **NOT** reset 90-day global period).

• **Mod 79:** Unrelated procedure by same surgeon during post-op period (**NEW** 90-day global period begins!).

• **Mod 51:** Multiple procedures (Reduces reimbursement 50% for 2nd+ code; look for circle-slash exempt symbol).

• **Mod 52 vs 53:** 52 = Reduced service (planned/physician choice); 53 = Discontinued service (patient safety risk).

CARD 2: 2026 E/M MDM SCORING

Medical Decision Making · Mandatory 2-of-3 Rule

RULE: Must meet or exceed 2 OUT OF 3 elements (Problems, Data, Risk)

• **Straightforward (99202 / 99212):**
- Problems: 1 self-limited or minor problem
- Data: None or minimal I Risk: Minimal (rest, gargles)

• **Low Complexity (99203 / 99213):**
- Problems: 2+ minor OR 1 stable chronic OR 1 acute uncomplicated
- Data: Cat 1 (2 unique tests/records) OR Cat 2 (independent historian)
- Risk: Low (OTC drugs, physical therapy, minor surgery no risk)

• **Moderate Complexity (99204 / 99214) [EXAM FAVORITE]:**
- Problems: 2+ stable chronic OR 1 chronic w/ exacerbation OR acute systemic
- Data: Cat 1 (3 items), Cat 2 (indep interp), OR Cat 3 (external MD consult)
- Risk: **Prescription drug management**, minor surgery with risk, SDOH

• **High Complexity (99205 / 99215):**
- Problems: 1+ severe chronic exacerbation OR acute threat to life/function
- Data: Any 2 of 3 categories (3 items, independent interp, external MD consult)
- Risk: **Intensive toxic drug monitoring**, emergency major surgery, DNR

CARD 3: SURGICAL CODING RULES

Lesion Excision Math & Wound Repair Hierarchy

LESION EXCISION FORMULA (CPT 11400–11646)

Code Size = Excised Diameter + (2 x Narrowest Margin) *Exam Trap: Never add lesion sizes together! Report each lesion code individually with its own anatomical location.*

WOUND REPAIR HIERARCHY (CPT 12001–13160)

• **Simple (12001–12021):** Superficial epidermis/dermis (one-layer closure; adhesive strips alone = E/M code only).

• **Intermediate (12031–12057):** Layered closure of deeper subcutaneous fascia OR heavily contaminated wound requiring extensive cleansing/ debridement.

• **Complex (13100–13160):** Reconstructive repair, extensive undermining, retention sutures, rotational flaps.

Summation Rule: Add lengths of wounds **only** if they share the SAME complexity class AND anatomical group!

Adjacent Tissue Transfer (14000–14302): Includes lesion excision! Never bill excision (11400–11646) separately with Z-plasty, W-plasty, or rotation flaps!

CARD 4: ANESTHESIA & FAST-PASS

Formula Calculations & 2.4 Min/Question Pacing

ANESTHESIA REIMBURSEMENT FORMULA

Total Payment = (Base Units + Time Units + Modifiers) x CF
- **Time Units:** 1 unit per 15 minutes (or exact fraction).
- **Qualifying Circumstances:** • 99100: Extreme Age (< 1 yr or > 70 yr) = +1 unit • 99116: Total Body Hypothermia = +5 units • 99135: Controlled Hypotension = +5 units

• **Physical Status Modifiers:** P1 (Normal), P2 (Mild disease), P3 (Severe systemic), P4 (Life threat), P5 (Moribund), P6 (Brain-dead).

WALLACE RULE OF NINES (Adult Body Surface Area %)

- **Head & Neck:** 9% I **Each Arm:** 9% (Front 4.5%, Back 4.5%)
- **Anterior Trunk:** 18% I **Posterior Trunk:** 18%
- **Each Leg:** 18% (Front 9%, Back 9%) I **Perineum:** 1%

EXAM PACING BENCHMARK

100 Questions in 240 Minutes = 2.4 Minutes / Question. Scan operative report headers and bold codes **first**. Circle tricky modifiers and move on if stalled > 3 minutes!