

PET/CT indications

PET scanning can be a powerful tool in the diagnosis and treatment of many diseases. Originally developed for brain imaging and research, PET usage branched to medical usage first in various lymphomas. PET utility has since been expanded with application in many neoplastic and non-neoplastic diseases.

PET scans essentially image the cellular function of the human body. Coupled with CT scan of the body, the fused PET/CT can pinpoint disease foci that can be very difficult to find by any other imaging modality. Currently, most staging or diagnostic PET studies are combined with non-contrast CT of the body.

As with many emerging technologies, there can be significant ambiguity regarding Medicare or private insurance reimbursement for PET/CT. In general, most insurance companies pay for clinically indicated PET procedures. To be clinically indicated, the PET scan must be potentially beneficial in providing information supportive of a diagnosis or in staging/ re-staging.

The following list is the current “Medicare approved” indications for PET/CT. In general, major insurance companies follow Medicare guidelines for reimbursement and may even reimburse more indications:

Breast CA	staging, restaging
Colorectal CA	diagnosis, staging and restaging
Esophageal CA	diagnosis, staging and restaging
Head and neck CA	diagnosis, staging and restaging
Non-small lung CA	diagnosis, staging and restaging
Lymphoma	diagnosis, staging and restaging
Melanoma	diagnosis, staging and restaging
Thyroid CA	restaging
Cervical CA	initial staging

For diagnostic indications to be reimbursed, the PET must either aid in directing an invasive procedure (biopsy), or help avoid an interventional procedure altogether.

PET/CT is covered for staging in clinical situations in which: 1) the stage of the CA remains in doubt despite other imaging; or PET/CT could replace some of the required imaging; and 2) clinical management of the patient would differ depending on the stage of the cancer.

For restaging, PET/CT must be used for detecting known or suspected recurrence or metastatic disease or if it might replace another imaging modality.

PET is also reimbursed in:

- Evaluation of indeterminate solitary pulmonary nodule;
- Dementia workup versus Alzheimer’s disease;
- Pre-surgical evaluation of refractory seizures; and

Myocardial viability evaluation prior to CABG

Medicare reimbursement for other cancers will be available if the patient's referring physician and the provider submit data to a clinical registry to assess the impact of PET on cancer patient management. The National Oncologic PET Registry (NOPR) was developed for this purpose. Through this program, reimbursement is available for: Prostate, Ovary, Pancreas, Bladder, Kidney and other urinary tract, Small-cell lung, Stomach, Uterus, Liver and intrahepatic bile duct cancers.

At Orange Coast Memorial state of the art PET/CT is offered Mondays and Thursdays with plenty of appointment times to accommodate your patients. All scans are read on-site by our radiology group of board certified, fellowship trained radiologists. Images and reports are available for review same day on the STENTOR system.