

ICD-10-CM Documentation and Coding Best Practices Atherosclerosis of the Aorta (I70.0)

Atherosclerosis refers to the buildup of fats, cholesterol and other substances (plaques) in and on the walls of medium and large arteries, such as the aorta. This weakens the vessel walls and restricts blood flow.

Symptoms/Consequences

Atherosclerosis develops gradually and is typically asymptomatic until the interior of an artery is narrowed by > 70%. This holds true for atherosclerosis of the aorta. Despite the relative lack of symptoms, atherosclerosis of the aorta can be associated with serious adverse health events:

- Atherosclerosis of the aorta is a major cause of aortic aneurysms
- Atherosclerosis of the thoracic aorta is a marker for significant CAD
- Atherosclerosis of the aortic arch is associated with increased risk for recurrent ischemic stroke

Risk factors

Besides aging, factors that increase the risk of atherosclerosis include:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Smoking/tobacco use
- An unhealthy diet
- Lack of exercise
- Family history of early heart disease

Diagnosis

Atherosclerosis of the aorta can be diagnosed by transesophageal echocardiography (TEE). It's also commonly noted as an incidental finding on a chest x-ray.

Treatment

Once diagnosed, treatment is aimed at reducing disease progression and preventing the development of complications. Recommended lifestyle changes include: losing weight, increasing physical activity, consuming a heart healthy diet and quitting smoking. For those patients with established diagnoses of HTN, high cholesterol and/or diabetes, maintaining strict control of these conditions is vital.

Documentation Tips

- "Aortic" – Coding Clinic guidelines advise against use of the term "aortic" by itself as this term can be applied to different anatomical structures (i.e., the aortic vessel and the aortic valve). Documentation needs to make clear which structure is being addressed.
- Anatomical landmarks – When referring to diseases of the aorta, documentation of anatomical landmarks helps the coder to differentiate between the vessel and the valve:
 - ✓ Ascending aorta
 - ✓ Aortic arch
 - ✓ Descending thoracic aorta
 - ✓ Abdominal aorta