



1150 Empire Central Place, Suite 112  
Dallas, TX 75247

1-866-57-LASER (866-575-2737)  
[www.MicrolightLaser.com](http://www.MicrolightLaser.com)

1-877-53-LASER (877-535-2737)  
[www.SportLaser.com](http://www.SportLaser.com)

© Innovative Medical Group, Inc.

---

## **CODING, BILLING & REIMBURSEMENT FOR LOW LEVEL LASER THERAPY (LLLT)**

*The following information deals with coding, reimbursement and billing issues generally and is by way of example only. MicrolightLaser® and SportLaser® make no guaranties or warranties regarding reimbursements from insurers, and no guarantees are made herein with respect to the best codes or what any specific insurance carrier would consider acceptable billing codes or would reimburse for this type of low level laser therapy (aka non-thermal or “cold” laser therapy).*



1150 Empire Central Place, Suite 112  
Dallas, TX 75247

1-866-57-LASER (866-575-2737)  
[www.MicrolightLaser.com](http://www.MicrolightLaser.com)

1-877-53-LASER (877-535-2737)  
[www.SportLaser.com](http://www.SportLaser.com)

© Innovative Medical Group, Inc.

## ICD–9 CM Codes International Classification of Diseases (with Clinical Modifiers)

For billing and reimbursement purposes, there are a number of procedure codes and diagnosis codes that can be used in regard to laser therapy. Since treatment procedure codes are driven by accepted diagnosis codes, this memorandum deals first with the diagnosis codes. Currently, there are clinicians from a variety of states using Low Level Laser Therapy (LLLT) to treat a number of conditions (among those are carpal tunnel syndrome, epicondylitis, arthritis, tendonitis, fasciitis, and a variety of other painful syndromes and wound management concerns). The appropriate diagnostic codes are important for reliable reimbursement. Below is a list of diagnoses that may be appropriate with low level laser therapy – *consult your coding books or other appropriate reference material for the ICD-9 code numbers.*

### SUGGESTED DIAGNOSES THAT MAY BE APPROPRIATE WITH LASER THERAPY:

#### **Inflammatory Conditions**

- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Epicondylitis
- Plantar Fasciitis
- Bursitis
- 1. Primary diagnosis
- 2. Pain
- 3. Restricted ROM / stiffness
- 4. Edema
- 5. Effusion
- 6. Paresthesia
- 7. Inflammation
- 8. Radicular pain
- 9. Myofasciitis
- 10. Muscle spasms

#### **Pain Management**

- Fibromyalgia
- Myofascial Pain
- Bursitis
- Fasciitis
- Low back pain
- Cervical/neck pain
- 1. Primary diagnosis
- 2. Pain
- 3. Inflammation
- 4. Restricted ROM / stiffness
- 5. Edema
- 6. Effusion
- 7. Myofasciitis
- 8. Muscle spasms

#### **Connective Tissue Injury / Disorders**

- Strains
- Sprains
- Tendonitis
- Tendon Ruptures
- 1. Primary diagnosis
- 2. Pain
- 3. Inflammation
- 4. Restricted ROM / stiffness
- 5. Edema
- 6. Effusion
- 7. Myofasciitis
- 8. Muscle spasms
- 9. Radicular pain

#### **Joint Injuries / Disorders**

- TM disorders
- Dislocations
- Ligament Injury
- Osteoarthritis
- 1. Primary diagnosis
- 2. Pain in joint
- 3. Inflammation
- 4. Restricted ROM / stiffness
- 5. Edema
- 6. Effusion of joint

#### **Muscle Injury / Disorders**

- Muscle Contractures
- Muscle bruises, contusions
- Myositis
- Muscle ruptures
- 1. Primary diagnosis

- 2. Pain in joint
- 3. Inflammation
- 4. Restricted ROM / stiffness
- 5. Edema
- 6. Muscle spasms
- 7. Myofasciitis

#### **Neurological Injury / Disorders**

- Prolapsed disk
- Ruptured disk
- Crush injuries
- Neuritis
- 1. Primary diagnosis
- 2. Radicular pain
- 3. Myofasciitis
- 4. decreased ROM / stiffness
- 5. Muscle spasms
- 6. Inflammation
- 7. Paresthesia
- 8. Edema
- 9. Effusion

#### **Skin Injuries / Conditions**

- Skin ulcers
- Burns
- Skin grafts
- Surgical incisions
- 1. Primary diagnosis
- 2. Pain in joint
- 3. Inflammation
- 4. Restricted ROM / stiffness
- 5. Edema



1150 Empire Central Place, Suite 112  
Dallas, TX 75247

1-877-53-LASER (866-535-2737)  
[www.SportLaser.com](http://www.SportLaser.com)

1-866-57-LASER (866-575-2737)  
[www.MicrolightLaser.com](http://www.MicrolightLaser.com)

© Innovative Medical Group, Inc.

## **CPT Codes - Current Procedural Terminology**

Based on an accepted diagnosis code and appropriate modifier (as discussed above), the billing is then made under a published procedure code. Cold laser or Low Level Laser Therapy (LLLT) does not have its own dedicated CPT code yet, so it is currently being billed and reimbursed under a variety of published CPT codes.

- 97039\* Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation - Constant Attendance Unlisted Modality; 15 minutes  
The problem with the code is that, being unspecified, it is occasionally rejected by some insurance carriers or hand audited. Make sure you have a one-page description of the treatment and the therapy (attached) if a carrier wants more information. You might try submitting this code as: 97039: Attended FDA Cleared Infrared Laser Therapy.
- 97140 Manual Therapy Techniques (e.g., mobilization/manipulation, manual lymphatic drainage, manual traction), one or more regions, each 15 minutes.  
Procedure/outcome/result is the key here, not the way in which the procedure/outcome/result is obtained/performed. When using CPT Code 97140 you are billing for what you are doing or accomplishing not the technique used to bring about the desired effect/result. No documentation is needed when submitting claims using 97140 unless the carrier requires it for that specific patient or case. When documentation is required, document what area was treated and what was accomplished (release, drainage, reduction in inflammation, etc...), but specific techniques (i.e., laser, ultrasound, etc...) are not required in this documentation.
- 97026 Infrared. While this code refers to an infrared modality, its origin is with an infrared heat lamp. This device is a non-thermal device, and as such does not produce heat. Therefore, it is NOT an infrared heating device. Use of this code may be inappropriate and it is likely to garner a very low value. To improve reimbursement, try listing it as an attended modality or adding a -22 or an "unusual procedural services." Three ways this code can be used: 97026: Attended photonic stimulation // 97026: Attended infrared light therapy // 97026-22: Attended infrared therapy
- 97032 Attended Electrical Stimulation.  
This is a code that many practitioners modify for laser and LED therapy. It can be billed in a number of ways and is reimbursed quite well. Although the CPT code will stay the same, 97032, the description will be changed to accurately reflect the service performed. Some ways that we have seen this code utilized by physicians and therapists: 97032: Attended Electrical-Photonic Stimulation // 97032: Attended Electrotherapy/IR // 97032: FDA Cleared Laser Photonic Stimulation.
- 97139\* Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation - Constant Attendance Procedure, 15 minute unit.  
This code is for a therapeutic procedure meaning that the doctor must have one-on-one contact with the patient. The strength of the code is that it tells the insurance carrier that the doctor is spending direct treatment time with the patient. The weakness of the code is that an unlisted procedure is more likely to be closely inspected by an insurance carrier. Coding might look like: 97139: FDA Cleared Laser Photonic Stimulation: Constant attendance.
- 97112 Neuromuscular reeducation of movement, balance, coordination, kinesthetic sense, posture, and/or proprioception for sitting and/or standing activities.
- 97799\* Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation - Unlisted Service or Procedure (negotiated fee, requires documentation)
- 97801 Acupuncture Modality

\* Codes ending in a "9" require an explanatory notation. Typically, these codes have been submitted referring to the FDA cleared device and therapy; for example: "97039 – FDA Cleared Laser Therapy". Also, you may be asked to submit additional documentation explaining the therapy; for that purpose, a one-page explanation accompanies this memo.



1150 Empire Central Place, Suite 112  
Dallas, TX 75247

1-877-53-LASER (866-535-2737)  
[www.SportLaser.com](http://www.SportLaser.com)

1-866-57-LASER (866-575-2737)  
[www.MicrolightLaser.com](http://www.MicrolightLaser.com)

© Innovative Medical Group, Inc.

## **Billing & Reimbursement**

**CHARGES** – The range of procedure/unit charges varies from clinician to clinician and is influenced by the condition and/or diagnosis as well as reimbursement rate. For the most part, per the CPT code provisions, 15 minutes per unit is the billing standard, and the range of unit fees runs from \$22 to \$60 per unit of 15 minutes, averaging at around \$50 per unit. Based on the majority of treatment protocols, almost all conditions and anatomical locations can be treated well within this incremental time frame. In treating rheumatoid arthritis of the hand, for example, clinicians might charge the unit of 15 minutes for each digit treated at a rate of \$44.00 per 15-minute unit. The majority of patients in today's medical environment are accustomed to making a *co-payment*. In most cases these co-pays are from \$10 to \$20. If we look at an average billed visit of \$40 to \$50, then a co-pay of \$20 has paid for nearly 40-50% of the billed procedure/modality fee.

**CASH PAY: OFFICE VISIT** – A number of clinicians have chosen to simply make this therapy a cash pay procedure - the thought being that this innovative therapy will bring in a new set of patients with a new treatment modality. These clinicians have chosen to make this a non-covered procedure considering the minimal cost (\$22 to \$60 per visit). Still other clinicians, in the appropriate circumstances, have chosen to incorporate the charges for laser therapy into the billing (and codes) for the office visit or the E&M charges (evaluation and management).

Currently, a very large number, in fact a majority of insurance and workman's compensation insurers reimbursing for low level laser therapy including Medicare and Medicaid. MicroLightLaser® is proactively working with all insurance carriers to facilitate approval for this therapy as an accepted benefit, and the list of insurers covering this therapy is growing.

As an example of a billing submission, a Michigan clinical group consistently receives reimbursement for treatment of Arthritis and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome with low-level laser therapy in the following manner:

- Procedure Code "97039 – FDA Cleared Laser Therapy" (enter this in Box 19 of electronic billing form);
- ICD-9 Code: Arthritis Code 714.0, CTS Code 354.0;
- Days or Units - 3; Charge = \$50 per unit (joint);
- Total charge per treatment = \$150.

Medicare paid \$11.71 per unit; Total per visit = \$33.51; 15 treatments @ \$33.51 = \$502.65 per joint treated.

As another example, a Texas chiropractic group received reimbursement for treatment of myofascial pain using the laser as the method of performing/assisting with myofascial release. The ICD-9 code for Myofascial pain is submitted, along with 97140 as the procedure code, with a billed amount of \$50 for a 15 minute unit of therapy. The procedure is reimbursed at \$27.13 per unit.

Please note, even though we might hope/expect that Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement would be universal and standardized, *most* insurance reimbursement will be based on the state or local insurance environment. MicroLightLaser® and SportLaser® make no guaranties or warranties regarding reimbursements from insurers.

Our recommendation is to bill using the codes and procedures outlined above. If additional documentation is requested by a carrier, we suggest you provide them with CPT Coding and Billing Addendum (next page). If additional assistance is needed, MicroLightLaser® and SportLaser® will work with you and the carrier. *If you have any questions or concerns regarding insurance billing and reimbursement for LLLT, please feel free to contact your rep or our home office.*

**MicrolightLaser® and SportLaser® are committed to working with you and your patients' insurance carriers to facilitate the best possible reimbursement conditions.**

## **FDA CLEARED LASER THERAPY**

### **Distributed by MICROLIGHTLASER® / SPORTLASER®**

The low-level laser therapy (LLLT) indicated and billed on the accompanying request for reimbursement is an FDA-cleared non-invasive, non-thermal, non-destructive laser therapy modality for treatment of a variety of conditions. Used and approved in other developed countries for over 27 years, LLLT has been the subject of double-blind, placebo controlled and randomized studies that were reviewed by the FDA for a number of years as part of the approval process preceding its clearance for use in the United States in 2002. With over 800 clinical studies and in excess of 2000 published medical articles, LLLT has passed the criteria for extensive research and study in the U.S.

Low-level lasers are also known as “cold lasers” and non-thermal lasers. Low-level lasers refer to the use of red-beam or near-infrared lasers with a wavelength between 600nm and 1000nm and wattage from 5-500 milliwatts. (In contrast, lasers used in surgery typically use 300 Watts.) When applied to the skin, these lasers produce no sensation and do not burn the skin. Because of the low absorption by human skin, the photonic energy of laser light can penetrate deeply into the tissues where it has a photobiostimulative effect. The mechanisms of its effects range from improved cellular repair and stimulation of the immune, lymphatic, and vascular systems.

Beginning in January of 2002, the FDA cleared for medical use a number of LLLT devices. In the 510(k) approvals for these products, the “indications for use” statements include:

1. Relief of neck and shoulder pain
2. Relief of carpal tunnel syndrome-associated pain and inflammation
3. Relief of muscle and joint pain
4. Relief of arthritis pain
5. Relief of muscle spasm
6. Relaxation of muscle tissue

Both the FDA and the general medical community have now accepted the preponderance of medical evidence substantiating the medical efficacy of low level laser therapy for treating conditions involving inflammation, joint pain, neurological disorders, connective tissue disorders and certain immunological and degenerative conditions such as rheumatoid and osteoarthritis. It is this recognition of the efficacy of this therapy for these conditions that has led to the FDA clearances for the various low level laser devices and therapy.

Clinicians affiliated with prestigious medical institutions such as Cedars Sinai Medical Center, Kaiser Permanente, the Scripps Institute, and University of Southern California Medical Center are using this therapy regularly to treat a variety of conditions. Therapists with organizations such as the U.S. Olympic training centers, Texas A&M University, University of Nebraska and others are treating patients with this advanced yet conservative modality and achieving remarkable success.

*This is NOT an experimental therapy.* Category III CPT codes are not used as this IS NOT an experimental modality. While in the 1980's and early 1990's multiple Institutional Review Boards (IRB's) examined this therapy and gave positive reports on the efficacy of LLLT, the vast amount of research and published clinical studies conducted since then have now established this as accepted medical therapy supported by current and ongoing clinical evidence validating positive outcomes.

LLLT is an attended contact therapy/procedure requiring manipulation of the device during the delivery of the therapy. The laser clinician must be trained and educated in the delivery of this therapy to determine the appropriate dosage of photonic energy to deliver with the laser and to determine the correct anatomical locations at which to provide the treatment. While a number of CPT codes are appropriate for billing this therapy, 97039, 97140, 97026, 97139, 97112, 97032, 97799, and 97801 are, at present, frequently used codes that have been reimbursed by insurers, including Medicare, Blue Cross / Blue Shield, United Healthcare and most Workers' Compensation insurers.

Available upon request are numerous studies, papers, abstracts, bibliographies and references from the hundreds of clinical studies involving LLLT and its application to conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, epicondylitis, nerve regeneration, low back pain, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, plantar fasciitis, wound healing and many others. These studies are grouped by category, i.e., Inflammation, Pain Management, Wound Healing, Sports Medicine, etc.

Cost savings: As but one example, in contrast to the estimated \$4000-\$12000 per patient cost of long-term physical therapy and surgical intervention in, e.g., CTS treatment, the average cost of conservative LLLT therapy for CTS is less than \$1200 (with many cases resolved in under \$1000 in therapy expense). This dramatic reduction in the cost of therapy is achieved with earlier intervention and actual resolution of the underlying condition rather than just treating the symptoms.

The clinician submitting this claim for reimbursement to you has included this document to clarify the use of the CPT code indicated and to provide to you the information regarding the clinician-intensive therapy involved with this patient.

**For more information or supporting documentation, please contact MicrolightLaser, at 866-575-2737 (866-57-LASER) or SportLaser at 877-535-2737 (877-53-LASER). © Innovative Medical Group, Inc. All Rights Reserved.**