



Z-Codes: What's the Difference?

The purpose of this Tip for Coders is to clarify which Z-code is appropriate to assign in certain circumstances. It focuses on the following:

- **Z09** *Follow-up examination after treatment for conditions other than malignant neoplasms* versus a code from category **Z47** *Other orthopaedic follow-up care* or category **Z48** *Other surgical follow-up care*
- **Z41** *Procedures for purposes other than remedying health state* versus a code from category **Z42** *Follow-up care involving plastic surgery*

Z09 versus Z47 or Z48: Examination or care?

Follow-up examination (Z09)

- **Z09** *Follow-up examination after treatment for conditions other than malignant neoplasms* includes medical surveillance following treatment.
- It is assigned when the purpose of the visit is an **examination** to assess the status of a previously treated condition — to assess whether or not the previous treatment was successful and that healing is progressing as expected.
- The focus is to assess the status of the disease, condition or injury that was previously treated. Assessment may include, but is not limited to, a physical assessment, laboratory tests and diagnostic imaging.
- The key word, intent or reason for the encounter is follow-up **examination** (or investigation).

Follow-up care (Z47 or Z48)

- **Z47** *Other orthopedic follow-up care* and **Z48** *Other surgical follow-up care* are assigned to indicate a reason for follow-up **care**.
- They are assigned when the purpose of the visit is for follow-up or prophylactic **care**, convalescent **care** or **care** to consolidate the treatment, to deal with residual states, to ensure that the condition has not recurred or to prevent recurrence.
- The focus is to deal with residual states or to perform the final step of (or to consolidate) the treatment. Care may include, but is not limited to, removing stitches, screws or a cast; and changing a dressing, cast or drain.
- The key word, intent or reason for the encounter is follow-up **care**.





Tip for Coders

The following table provides examples of follow-up **examination** versus follow-up **care**.

Follow-up examination versus follow-up care

Description of case	Follow-up examination or follow-up care?
Patient falls and fractures shaft of radius and ulna. Cast is applied. Patient is discharged home.	
Patient comes back to orthopedic clinic 4 weeks later for X-ray to assess status of healing. Fracture is healing. Cast will be left on for 2 more weeks.	<p>Follow-up examination</p> <p>This is a routine assessment following treatment of the fracture. It is strictly an assessment of post-treatment status to determine whether the fracture is healing appropriately.</p> <p>Assign Z09.4 <i>Follow-up examination after treatment of fracture.</i></p>
Patient comes back to orthopedic clinic 6 weeks later for cast removal. X-ray is done to assess status of healing. Fracture is healed. Cast is removed.	<p>Follow-up care</p> <p>This is a visit to deal with residual states. The fracture has healed. The purpose of this visit is to remove the cast.</p> <p>Assign Z47.8 <i>Other specified orthopaedic follow-up care.</i></p>
Patient has an acute myocardial infarction. Quadruple bypass surgery is performed. Patient is discharged home.	
Patient comes back to heart clinic for staple removal. Patient is doing well. Appointment is made for reassessment in 6 months.	<p>Follow-up care</p> <p>This is a visit to deal with residual states. The operative wound has healed. The purpose of this visit is to remove the staples.</p> <p>Assign Z48.0 <i>Attention to surgical dressings and sutures.</i></p>
Patient comes back to heart clinic and is seen by a cardiologist. Patient is doing well on current medications. Appointment is made for reassessment in 6 months.	<p>Follow-up examination</p> <p>This is a routine assessment following treatment (bypass surgery). It is strictly an assessment of post-treatment status to determine whether the patient is healing appropriately.</p> <p>Assign Z09.0 <i>Follow-up examination after surgery for other conditions.</i></p>

Assess your understanding — are the following cases follow-up examination or follow-up care?

Description of case
1. Patient cut her leg. Skin is not amenable to stitches. Dressing is applied. Patient is discharged. Patient comes back to clinic every 2 days for dressing change.
2. Patient cut his foot. Wound is cleaned and dressing is applied. Patient is discharged. Patient comes back to clinic to check whether wound is healing as expected.
3. Patient presents with fever and cough. X-ray confirms pneumonia. Antibiotics are prescribed. Patient is discharged. Patient comes back to clinic for X-ray. X-ray reveals no change. Patient is told to continue antibiotics.



Z41 versus Z42: Cosmetic and body-altering surgery versus follow-up plastic surgery?

Cosmetic and body-altering surgery (Z41)

- Assigned when the reason for admission is **cosmetic** or **body-altering surgery**.
- The surgery is not medically necessary to treat a condition or disease; it is requested by the patient because he or she wants to modify his or her physical appearance for esthetic purposes or personal preference.
- Examples include, but are not limited to, admission for face lift, hair transplant, breast augmentation and transgender reassignment.

Follow-up plastic surgery (Z42)

- Assigned when the reason for admission is plastic or reconstructive surgery to **repair disfigurement** due to a healed injury or previous operative site.
- The surgery is part of the overall treatment and care of the patient to deal with residual states of disfigurement due to an injury or surgical procedure.
- Examples include, but are not limited to, admission for reconstructive surgery for a healed burn and breast reconstruction surgery following a mastectomy for breast cancer.



Tip for Coders

The following table provides examples of **cosmetic** and **body-altering surgery** versus **follow-up plastic surgery**.

Cosmetic and body-altering surgery versus follow-up plastic surgery

Description of case	Cosmetic and body-altering surgery or follow-up plastic surgery?
Patient has an extensive excision of basal cell carcinoma of the nose. Patient is discharged home.	
The surgical wound has healed. The patient has completed treatment for basal cell carcinoma. The patient now presents for rhinoplasty.	<p>Follow-up plastic surgery</p> <p>This is follow-up care involving plastic surgery. The patient is having plastic surgery after the operative wound has healed in order to repair the disfigurement that was caused by the previous surgery.</p> <p>Assign Z42.0 <i>Follow-up care involving plastic surgery of head and neck.</i></p>
Patient has acne scars.	
Patient presents for facial dermabrasion.	<p>Cosmetic surgery</p> <p>This is plastic surgery for cosmetic or esthetic purposes. The surgery is not medically necessary. The patient is having the procedure because she wants to modify her physical appearance for esthetic purposes.</p> <p>Assign Z41.1 <i>Other plastic surgery for unacceptable cosmetic appearance.</i></p>
Patient lost over 100 pounds.	
Patient presents for excision of excessive and redundant abdominal skin.	<p>Cosmetic surgery</p> <p>This is plastic surgery for cosmetic or esthetic purposes. The surgery is not medically necessary. The patient is having the procedure because he wants to modify his appearance for esthetic purposes.</p> <p>Assign Z41.1 <i>Other plastic surgery for unacceptable cosmetic appearance.</i></p> <p>Note: L98.7 <i>Excessive and redundant skin and subcutaneous tissue</i> is not the most responsible diagnosis/main problem. If assigned, it is an optional diagnosis type (3)/other problem.</p>

Assess your understanding — are the following cases cosmetic and body-altering surgery or follow-up plastic surgery?

Description of case
1. Patient presents for transgender reassignment surgery.
2. Patient sustained a crush injury to his hand. His injury has healed. He now presents for reconstruction surgery of the phalanges of the hand using a pedicled transposition flap.



Answers: Follow-up examination or follow-up care

1. Follow-up **care: Z48.0** *Attention to surgical dressings and sutures*

Rationale: The wound is assessed during the dressing change. However, the primary purpose of the visit is to change the dressing. Therefore, **Z48.0** is assigned.

2. Follow-up **examination: Z09.8** *Follow-up examination after other treatment for other conditions*

Rationale: The primary purpose of the visit is to assess whether the previously treated wound is healing as expected. Therefore, **Z09.8** is assigned.

3. Follow-up **examination: Z09.8** *Follow-up examination after other treatment for other conditions*

Rationale: The primary purpose of the visit is to assess the status of the pneumonia. That status has not changed. Therefore, **Z09.8** is assigned.

Answers: Cosmetic and body-altering surgery versus follow-up plastic surgery

1. **Cosmetic and body-altering surgery: Z41.80** *Procedures for transgender reassignment*

Rationale: The primary purpose of the visit is that the patient is transgender and wants surgery to change his (currently feminine) appearance to match his gender. Transgender reassignment surgery is body-altering surgery to modify physical appearance and the patient's anatomy to align with his or her gender. Therefore, **Z41.80** is assigned.

2. **Follow-up plastic surgery: Z42.3** *Follow-up care involving plastic surgery of upper extremity*

Rationale: The primary purpose of the visit is for plastic and reconstructive surgery following a healed injury. Therefore, **Z42.3** is assigned.