Intracellular micronutrient panel testing is considered investigational.

Policy Guidelines

There is no specific CPT code for this panel of testing.

The specific CPT codes for each of the elements of the panel would most likely be reported (e.g., 84590 for vitamin A, 82310 for calcium, 82725 for oleic acid) along with 1 unit of a not otherwise specified (i.e., 84591) or unlisted (i.e., 84999) code for the balance of the panel, which does not have specific codes.

According to SpectraCell Laboratories, their total antioxidant function testing (which they call SPECTROX®) is reported using the following CPT code:

- 86353: Lymphocyte transformation, mitogen (phytomitogen) or antigen induced blastogenesis

IntraCellular Diagnostics uses electron microscopy for which the following CPT code might be reported:

- 88348: Electron microscopy, diagnostic

Description

Commercial laboratories offer panels of tests evaluating intracellular levels of micronutrients (essential vitamins and minerals). Potential uses of these tests include screening for nutritional deficiencies in healthy people or those with chronic disease and aiding in the diagnosis of disease in patients with nonspecific symptoms.

Related Policies

- N/A

Benefit Application

Benefit determinations should be based in all cases on the applicable contract language. To the extent there are any conflicts between these guidelines and the contract language, the contract language will control. Please refer to the member's contract benefits in effect at the time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage of these services as it applies to an individual member.

Some state or federal mandates (e.g., Federal Employee Program (FEP)) prohibits plans from denying Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved technologies as investigational. In these instances, plans may have to consider the coverage eligibility of FDA-approved technologies on the basis of medical necessity alone.

Regulatory Status

Clinical laboratories may develop and validate tests in-house and market them as a laboratory service; laboratory-developed tests must meet the general regulatory standards of the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments. Intracellular micronutrient testing, offered by...
SpectraCell and IntraCellular Diagnostics, is available under the auspices of the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments. Laboratories that offer laboratory-developed tests must be licensed by the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments for high-complexity testing. To date, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has chosen not to require any regulatory review of this test.

**Rationale**

**Background**

**Vitamin Deficiencies**

“Micronutrients” collectively refer to essential vitamins and minerals necessary in trace amounts for health. Clinical deficiency states (states occurring after prolonged consumption of a diet lacking the nutrient that is treated by adding the nutrient to the diet) have been reported for vitamins A, B₁, B₂, C, and D, selenium, and other micronutrients. Classic nutritional deficiency diseases are uncommon in the United States; most people derive sufficient nutrition from their diets alone or in combination with over-the-counter multivitamins.

Laboratory tests are available for individual micronutrients and are generally used to confirm suspected micronutrient deficiencies. Testing is performed by serum analysis using standardized values for defining normal and deficient states. Also, some commercial laboratories offer panels of vitamin and mineral testing that also use serum analysis.

**Diagnostic Testing**

This evidence review evaluates laboratory tests that measure the intracellular levels of micronutrients. This testing, also known as intracellular micronutrient analysis, micronutrient testing, or functional intracellular analysis, is sometimes claimed to be superior to serum testing because intracellular levels reflect more stable micronutrient levels over longer time periods than serum levels and because intracellular levels are not influenced by recent nutrition intake. However, the relation between serum and intracellular levels of micronutrients is complex. The balance of intra- and extracellular levels depends on a number of factors, including the physiology of cellular transport mechanisms and the individual cell type.

At least 2 commercial laboratories offer intracellular testing for micronutrients. Laboratories perform a panel of tests evaluating the intracellular level of various micronutrients (e.g., minerals, vitamins, amino acids, fatty acids). The test offered by IntraCellular Diagnostics evaluates epithelial cells from buccal swabs and assesses levels of intracellular mineral electrolyte (i.e., magnesium, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, sodium, chloride). SpectraCell Laboratories offers a panel of tests that evaluates the intracellular status of micronutrients within lymphocytes in blood samples. The micronutrients measured by the test include:

- **Vitamins:** A, B₁, B₂, B₆, B₁₂, C, D, K; biotin, folate, pantothenic acid
- **Minerals:** calcium, magnesium, zinc, copper
- **Antioxidants:** α-lipoic acid, coenzyme Q₁₀, cysteine, glutathione, selenium, vitamin E
- **Amino acids:** asparagine, glutamine, serine
- **Carbohydrate metabolism:** chromium, fructose sensitivity, glucose-insulin metabolism
- **Fatty acids:** oleic acid
- **Metabolites:** choline, inositol, carnitine

The SpectraCell micronutrient panel also evaluates total antioxidant function.

**Literature Review**

Evidence reviews assess whether a medical test is clinically useful. A useful test provides information to make a clinical management decision that improves the net health outcome. That is, the balance of benefits and harms is better when the test is used to manage the condition than when another test or no test is used to manage the condition.
The first step in assessing a medical test is to formulate the clinical context and purpose of the test. The test must be technically reliable, clinically valid, and clinically useful for that purpose. Evidence reviews assess the evidence on whether a test is clinically valid and clinically useful. Technical reliability is outside the scope of these reviews, and credible information on technical reliability is available from other sources.

**Intracellular Micronutrient Analysis**

**Clinical Context and Test Purpose**
The purpose of diagnostic testing of patients who have chronic diseases or nonspecific generalized symptoms is to identify micronutrient deficiencies, not indicated by specific signs and/or symptoms, that would inform management decisions and improve health outcomes. The question addressed in this evidence review is: Does intracellular micronutrient analysis testing improve health outcomes in individuals with chronic diseases or nonspecific generalized symptoms?

The following PICOTS (Patients, Interventions, Comparators, Outcomes, Timing, and Setting) were used to select literature to inform this review.

**Patients**
The relevant populations of interest are patients with chronic diseases or with nonspecific generalized symptoms.

**Interventions**
The test being considered is intracellular micronutrient analysis.

**Comparators**
The following practices are currently being used to identify micronutrient deficiencies: serum testing for nutritional deficiencies or standard management without nutritional testing.

**Outcomes**
The general outcomes of interest are test accuracy, symptoms, and change in disease status.

**Timing**
The time frame for short- and long-term symptom improvement and change in disease status varies by the chronic disease affecting the patient.

**Setting**
Testing can be ordered in the primary care or specialty setting.

**Simplifying Test Terms**
There are 3 core characteristics for assessing a medical test. Whether imaging, laboratory, or other, all medical tests must be:
- Technically reliable
- Clinically valid
- Clinically useful

Because different specialties may use different terms for the same concept, we are highlighting the core characteristics. The core characteristics also apply to different uses of tests, such as diagnosis, prognosis, and monitoring treatment.

Diagnostic tests detect presence or absence of a condition. Surveillance and treatment monitoring are essentially diagnostic tests over a time frame. Surveillance to see whether a condition develops or progresses is a type of detection. Treatment monitoring is also a type of detection because the purpose is to see if treatment is associated with the disappearance, regression, or progression of the condition.
Prognostic tests predict the risk of developing a condition in the future. Tests to predict response to therapy are also prognostic. Response to therapy is a type of condition and can be either a beneficial response or an adverse response. The term predictive test is often used to refer to response to therapy. To simplify terms, we use prognostic to refer both to predicting a future condition or to predicting a response to therapy.

**Technically Reliable**
Assessment of technical reliability focuses on specific tests and operators and requires review of unpublished and often proprietary information. Review of specific tests, operators, and unpublished data are outside the scope of this evidence review, and alternative sources exist. This evidence review focuses on the clinical validity and clinical utility.

**Clinically Valid**
A test must detect the presence or absence of a condition, the risk of developing a condition in the future, or treatment response (beneficial or adverse).

No studies on the sensitivity and specificity of intracellular micronutrient analysis tests compared with a reference standard (e.g., serum testing) were identified.

**Clinically Useful**
A test is clinically useful if the use of the results informs management decisions that improve the net health outcome of care. The net health outcome can be improved if patients receive correct therapy, or more effective therapy, or avoid unnecessary therapy, or avoid unnecessary testing.

**Direct Evidence**
Direct evidence of clinical utility is provided by studies that have compared health outcomes for patients managed with and without the test. Because these are intervention studies, the preferred evidence would be from randomized controlled trials.

No evidence from randomized controlled trials was identified supporting the use of intracellular micronutrient analysis tests.

**Chain of Evidence**
Indirect evidence on clinical utility rests on clinical validity. If the evidence is insufficient to demonstrate test performance, no inferences can be made about clinical utility.

An observational study by Houston (2010) provided some data relevant to a chain of evidence. The study described a single center’s experience with micronutrient testing in the management of hypertension. A total of 3338 patients treated over 5 years received micronutrient testing. Among the 3338 patients, 671 (20%) were considered to have hypertension (defined as blood pressure >140/90 mm Hg). The author stated that there were differences in levels of many micronutrients in the hypertensive vs nonhypertensive populations but did not report the specific micronutrients for which levels differed. Hypertensive patients identified as having micronutrient deficiencies were treated with high-dose therapy of appropriate supplements, as well as with recommendations on optimal diet, exercise, and weight management. The author reported that, after 6 months, 62% of the hypertensive population had succeeded in reaching their blood pressure goals and had tapered and discontinued hypertensive medication. The report did not provide data on micronutrient levels before or after treatment or 6-month blood pressure data for a comparison group of hypertensive patients who did not undergo micronutrient testing.

**Section Summary: Clinically Useful**
There is no direct evidence that intracellular micronutrient analysis improves health outcomes in patients with chronic diseases or nonspecific generalized symptoms. Moreover, there are insufficient data to construct a chain of evidence that intracellular micronutrient testing would
likely lead to identifying patients whose health outcomes would be improved compared with alternative approaches to patient management.

Summary of Evidence
For individuals who have chronic diseases or nonspecific generalized symptoms who receive intracellular micronutrient analysis, the evidence includes observational studies. Relevant outcomes are test accuracy, symptoms, and change in disease status. No studies were identified that evaluated the clinical validity or clinical utility of intracellular micronutrient testing compared with standard testing for vitamin or mineral levels. Limited data from observational studies are available on correlations between serum and intracellular micronutrient levels. No randomized controlled trials or other comparative studies were identified evaluating the direct health impact of intracellular micronutrient testing. Moreover, there are insufficient data to construct a chain of evidence that intracellular micronutrient testing would likely lead to identifying patients whose health outcomes would be improved compared with alternative approaches to patient management. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

Supplemental Information

Practice Guidelines and Position Statements
No guidelines or statements were identified.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations
Not applicable.

Medicare National Coverage
There is no national coverage determination. In the absence of a national coverage determination, coverage decisions are left to the discretion of local Medicare carriers.

Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials
A search of ClinicalTrials.gov in January 2018 did not identify any ongoing or unpublished trials that would likely influence this review.

References


Documentation for Clinical Review

- No records required

Coding

This Policy relates only to the services or supplies described herein. Benefits may vary according to product design; therefore, contract language should be reviewed before applying the terms of the Policy. Inclusion or exclusion of codes does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement.
IE

The following services may be considered investigational.

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<thead>
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<th>Type</th>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82725</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84590</td>
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<td></td>
<td>84999</td>
<td>Unlisted chemistry procedure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86353</td>
<td>Lymphocyte transformation, mitogen (phytomitogen) or antigen induced blastogenesis</td>
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Policy History

This section provides a chronological history of the activities, updates and changes that have occurred with this Medical Policy.

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<th>Effective Date</th>
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<td>BCBSA Medical Policy adoption</td>
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<td>01/01/2017</td>
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Definitions of Decision Determinations

**Medically Necessary:** A treatment, procedure, or drug is medically necessary only when it has been established as safe and effective for the particular symptoms or diagnosis, is not investigational or experimental, is not being provided primarily for the convenience of the patient or the provider, and is provided at the most appropriate level to treat the condition.

**Investigational/Experimental:** A treatment, procedure, or drug is investigational when it has not been recognized as safe and effective for use in treating the particular condition in accordance with generally accepted professional medical standards. This includes services where approval by the federal or state governmental is required prior to use, but has not yet been granted.

**Split Evaluation:** Blue Shield of California/Blue Shield of California Life & Health Insurance Company (Blue Shield) policy review can result in a split evaluation, where a treatment, procedure, or drug will be considered to be investigational for certain indications or conditions, but will be deemed safe and effective for other indications or conditions, and therefore potentially medically necessary in those instances.

Prior Authorization Requirements (as applicable to your plan)

Within five days before the actual date of service, the provider must confirm with Blue Shield that the member's health plan coverage is still in effect. Blue Shield reserves the right to revoke an authorization prior to services being rendered based on cancellation of the member's eligibility. Final determination of benefits will be made after review of the claim for limitations or exclusions.
Questions regarding the applicability of this policy should be directed to the Prior Authorization Department. Please call (800) 541-6652 or visit the provider portal at www.blueshieldca.com/provider.

Disclaimer: This medical policy is a guide in evaluating the medical necessity of a particular service or treatment. Blue Shield of California may consider published peer-reviewed scientific literature, national guidelines, and local standards of practice in developing its medical policy. Federal and state law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific contract provisions/exclusions, take precedence over medical policy and must be considered first in determining covered services. Member contracts may differ in their benefits. Blue Shield reserves the right to review and update policies as appropriate.