Clinical documentation and coding tips

Fractures

Fracture types

Traumatic fractures

A traumatic fracture is caused by a sudden, forceful impact, for example due to a motor vehicle accident, fall, or sports injury.

- 7th characters: Traumatic fracture categories have additional options for the 7th character.
- Multiple fractures: These should be sequenced according to the severity of the fractures.
- Open vs. closed: If the fracture is **not indicated as open or closed**, it should be coded as **closed**.
- Displaced vs. non-displaced: If the fracture is **not indicated as displaced or non-displaced**, it should be coded as **displaced**.

Pathologic fractures

A pathologic fracture occurs when a bone breaks in an area weakened by another disease process, for example, due to osteoporosis or a neoplasm.

ICD-10 documentation guidance for fractures

The **7th character** is required for all codes within fracture categories, as instructed in the **Tabular List**.

- The 7th character **must occupy the 7th position** in the code.
- Use a **placeholder "X"** to fill empty characters if needed.

7th character definitions	
A – Initial encounter	• Use **A** for each encounter where the patient is receiving **active treatment**. • **Active treatment** refers to interventions such as surgical procedures, emergency department care, or placement of a cast. • **Important:** The assignment of the 7th character is based on **active treatment**, not whether it is the **first visit** with the provider.
D – Subsequent encounter (routine healing)	Use **D** for follow-up care during the **healing or recovery phase**.
S – Sequela	Use for complications or conditions that arise as a direct result of the original injury (i.e., a residual effect that occurs after the acute phase of an illness or injury has passed, a complication of the original illness).

Independence ✚

IBX

Documentation best practices

7th character example	• A patient falls at home and has an X-ray confirming a fracture. The patient is placed in a cast. • The **active treatment** is the placement of the cast, so **A** is assigned.
D – Subsequent encounter (routine healing) example	• A patient returns for a follow-up visit after a cast was placed. The physician orders an X-ray to check healing, and no adjustments are made. • Since no treatment was rendered, this is a s**ubsequent encounter**, so **D** is assigned.
S – Sequela example	Contracture due to cast and prolonged immobilization.

References

• Contract-Level Risk Adjustment Data Validation Medical Record Reviewer Guidance In effect as of 03/20/2019. Yew, K.S. & Cheng, E.M. (2015).

• Optum (2025). ICD-10-CM Expert for Physicians: The Complete Official Code Set (2025)

• ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting FY 2025; Section I.A.15