

## Understanding MDM Complexity of Problems

The complexity of patient problems plays a vital role in determining the overall Medical Decision-Making (MDM), which directly impacts the Evaluation and Management (E/M) service level and ultimately influences reimbursement. It is critical to accurately classify diagnoses to avoid undervaluing the level of complexity.

For example, both acne and hay fever (allergic rhinitis) are chronic conditions requiring ongoing management, yet they are frequently misclassified as self-limited or minor problems.

To assist in accurate coding and understanding, we have compiled examples for each level of problem complexity as a reference guide.

Complexity of Problems	Definition	Examples
Self-Limited or minor problem	A problem that runs a definite and prescribed course, is transient in nature and is not likely to permanently alter health status. <i>Ask whether it could have resolved on its own or could have been effectively self-treated without a visit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncomplicated mosquito bites</li> <li>• Uncomplicated diaper rash</li> <li>• Follow-up resolved condition that was low severity</li> <li>• Cold</li> <li>• Tinea corporis</li> <li>• Uncomplicated pharyngitis</li> <li>• Minor abrasions</li> <li>• Uncomplicated headache</li> <li>• Mild muscle aches</li> </ul>
Stable Chronic Illness	A problem with an expected duration of at least one year or until the death of the patient. <i>A patient who is not at his or her treatment goal is not stable, even if the condition has not changed and there is no short-term threat to life or function. For example, a patient with persistently poorly controlled blood pressure for whom better control is a goal is not stable, even if the pressures are not changing and the patient is asymptomatic.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mild chronic asthma (controlled)</li> <li>• Type II Diabetes (controlled)</li> <li>• Hypertension (controlled)</li> <li>• Hyperlipidemia (controlled)</li> <li>• COPD (controlled)</li> <li>• Hypothyroidism (controlled)</li> <li>• Acne (controlled)</li> <li>• Osteoarthritis (managed)</li> <li>• Major Depressive Disorder (in remission)</li> <li>• Hay Fever (controlled)</li> </ul>
Acute, uncomplicated illness or injury	A recent or new short-term problem with low risk of morbidity for which treatment is considered. There is little to no risk of mortality with treatment, and full recovery without functional impairment is expected. <i>A problem that is normally self-limited or minor but is not resolved consistent with a definite and prescribed course is an acute, uncomplicated illness.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• URI (viral)</li> <li>• Acute Pharyngitis (antibiotic prescribed)</li> <li>• Acute Sinusitis (antibiotic prescribed)</li> <li>• Acute Otitis Media (antibiotic prescribed)</li> <li>• Sprained ankle, without fracture</li> <li>• Minor burns -First degree</li> <li>• Minor lacerations requiring stitches</li> <li>• Conjunctivitis (antibiotic prescribed)</li> <li>• Uncomplicated Cystitis (antibiotic prescribed)</li> <li>• Gastroenteritis-short term diarrhea/vomiting</li> </ul>

Complexity of Problems	Definition	Examples
<p><b>Acute, uncomplicated illness or injury requiring hospital inpatient or observation level care</b></p>	<p>A recent or new short-term problem with low risk of morbidity for which treatment is required. There is little to no risk of mortality with treatment, and full recovery without functional impairment is expected. The treatment required is delivered in a hospital inpatient or observation level setting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncomplicated appendicitis</li> <li>• Uncomplicated Kidney stones</li> <li>• Acute Gastroenteritis- severe vomiting and diarrhea, requiring fluid management</li> <li>• UTI- immunocompromised patients where complications could arise.</li> <li>• Cellulitis uncomplicated</li> <li>• Pneumonia (mild to moderate)</li> <li>• Acute Pyelonephritis</li> <li>• Allergic reaction</li> <li>• Acute Pancreatitis</li> <li>• Asthma, exacerbated</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stable, acute illness</b></p>	<p>A problem that is new or recent for which treatment has been initiated. The patient is improved and, while resolution may not be complete, is stable with respect to this condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acute Pharyngitis (antibiotic prescribed) but still has symptoms</li> <li>• Acute Sinusitis (antibiotic prescribed) but still has symptoms</li> <li>• Acute Otitis Media (antibiotic prescribed) but still has symptoms</li> <li>• Conjunctivitis (antibiotic prescribed) but still has symptoms</li> <li>• Uncomplicated Cystitis (antibiotic prescribed) but still has symptoms</li> </ul>
<p><b>Chronic illness with exacerbation, progression, or side effects of treatment</b></p>	<p>A chronic illness that is acutely worsening, poorly controlled, or progressing with an intent to control progression and requiring additional supportive care or requiring attention to treatment for side effects. <i>An "exacerbation" refers to a worsening of a disease's symptoms, while a "severe exacerbation" indicates a significantly more serious worsening of symptoms.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COPD with symptoms worsening</li> <li>• CHF with exacerbation</li> <li>• Diabetes - uncontrolled</li> <li>• Chronic Hypertension with exacerbated</li> <li>• CKD with decline in kidney function</li> <li>• IBD with exacerbation</li> <li>• Arthritis flareup</li> <li>• Alzheimer's with delirium</li> <li>• Heart disease worsening of symptoms</li> <li>• Cystic Fibrosis exacerbation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Undiagnosed new problem with uncertain prognosis</b></p>	<p>A problem in the differential diagnosis that represents a condition likely to result in a high risk of morbidity without treatment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unexplained fatigue with recent weight loss and enlarged lymph nodes</li> <li>• Abdominal pain with no clear source on imaging</li> <li>• New onset headaches with visual changes</li> <li>• Persistent unexplained fever with negative blood cultures</li> <li>• Skin lesion with atypical features</li> <li>• Urinary incontinence with no identifiable cause</li> <li>• Abnormal heart rhythm with unclear origin</li> <li>• Sudden onset of significant cognitive decline</li> <li>• Persistent unexplained neurological symptoms</li> <li>• Tumor requiring additional testing</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Acute illness with systemic symptoms</b></p>	<p>An illness that causes systemic symptoms and has a high risk of morbidity without treatment. For systemic general symptoms, such as fever, body aches, or fatigue in a minor illness that may be treated to alleviate symptoms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pyelonephritis</li> <li>• Acute bacterial Pneumonia</li> <li>• Colitis</li> <li>• Influenza</li> <li>• Covid-19</li> <li>• Acute viral gastroenteritis</li> <li>• Mononucleosis</li> <li>• Meningitis</li> <li>• Acute Hepatitis</li> <li>• Sepsis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Acute, complicated injury</b></p>	<p>An injury which requires treatment that includes evaluation of body systems that are not directly part of the injured organ, the injury is extensive, or the treatment options are multiple and/or associated with risk of morbidity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chest trauma</li> <li>• Open Fracture</li> <li>• Third degree Burn</li> <li>• Head injury with brief loss of consciousness</li> <li>• Severe Laceration</li> <li>• Multiple injuries</li> <li>• Dislocated Joint with nerve damage</li> <li>• Crush injury</li> </ul>
<p><b>Chronic illness with severe exacerbation, progression, or side effects of treatment</b></p>	<p>The severe exacerbation or progression of a chronic illness or severe side effects of treatment that have significant risk of morbidity and may require escalation in level of care. <i>An "exacerbation" refers to a worsening of a disease's symptoms, while a "severe exacerbation" indicates a significantly more serious worsening of symptoms</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancer</li> <li>• Osteoarthritis</li> <li>• COPD with symptoms worsening</li> <li>• CHF with exacerbation</li> <li>• Diabetes- uncontrolled</li> <li>• Chronic Hypertension with exacerbated</li> <li>• CKD with decline in kidney function</li> <li>• IBD with exacerbation</li> <li>• Arthritis flareup</li> <li>• Alzheimer's with delirium</li> </ul>
<p><b>Acute or chronic illness or injury that poses a threat to life or bodily function</b></p>	<p>An acute illness with systemic symptoms, an acute complicated injury, or a chronic illness or injury with exacerbation and/or progression, side effects of treatment, that poses a threat to life or bodily function in the near term without treatment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acute myocardial infarction</li> <li>• Stroke</li> <li>• Pulmonary embolism</li> <li>• Severe sepsis</li> <li>• Anaphylaxis</li> <li>• Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome</li> <li>• Severe burns</li> <li>• Subarachnoid Hemorrhage</li> <li>• Advanced cancer with metastases</li> <li>• Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation</li> </ul>