



Chapter 12: Diseases of the Skin and Subcutaneous Tissue (L00–L99)

Quick-Reference Student Guide

CODING DECODED

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a. Pressure Ulcer Stage Codes

- **Category L89** identifies both site and stage of a pressure ulcer.
- Stages recognized: 1–4, deep tissue pressure injury, unspecified stage, and unstageable.
- Assign as many L89 codes as needed — one per pressure ulcer the patient has.

Unstageable vs. Unspecified — don't mix these up

- **Unstageable (L89.--0)**: stage genuinely cannot be clinically determined (e.g., covered by eschar or treated with a skin/muscle graft).
- **Unspecified (L89.--9)**: no documentation of stage at all — a different situation.
- If an unstageable ulcer's true stage is revealed after debridement, code only the revealed stage.

Documented Stage

- Base the stage code on provider documentation or terms found in the Alphabetic Index.

Query trigger: Clinical term describes a stage but isn't in the Alphabetic Index, and no stage is otherwise documented.

Healed, Healing & Progressing Ulcers

- **Healed on admission:** no code assigned.
- **Healing:** code the documented stage; if stage isn't stated, use the unspecified-stage code.
- **Present on admission, healed by discharge:** code the site/stage as it was at admission.
- **Worsens during the stay:** assign TWO codes — the stage at admission AND the highest stage reached.

Query trigger: Unclear whether it's a new (current) ulcer or a healing one.

Deep Tissue Pressure Injury

- Assign only the deep-tissue-damage code (L89.--6) — do not add a separate stage code.

b. Non-Pressure Chronic Ulcers

- Follow the same logic as pressure ulcers, but using severity level instead of stage:
- **Healed on admission:** no code.
- **Healing, severity undocumented:** use the unspecified-severity code.
- **Present on admission, healed by discharge:** code site/severity as of admission.
- **Progresses to a higher severity during the stay:** assign TWO codes — admission severity + highest severity reached.

Query trigger: Unclear whether the ulcer is new/current versus healing.