



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

What is an abdominal aortic aneurysm (an-yer-iz-um)?

The aorta is the main artery of the chest and abdomen that carries blood from the heart to all the body's vital organs, and to the legs and feet. An abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) is a weakening in the wall of the aorta that causes a "ballooning" of a part of the artery. It is like a weak area of an old fashioned rubber inner tube. An aneurysm can get bigger and, if not diagnosed and treated, burst causing death. In the United States 15,000 people die every year from an aortic aneurysm that bursts.

What are the risk factors?

If you are over the age of 60, have a family history of AAAs, suffer from high blood pressure or smoke you are at an increased risk of having this type of aneurysm. The risk increases with age and is more common in men than women. If any members of your family have been diagnosed with an AAA, let your health care provider know and a screening exam can be arranged.

What are the symptoms?

Most of the time there are no symptoms associated with AAAs. Most symptoms are found by chance during routine physical examination, or the course of treatment or testing for other ailments. Sometimes, a person may feel low back pain or abdominal pain. **Call your doctor right away if you have symptoms.**

What is the treatment?

Treatment with medicines alone cannot repair an AAA. Surgery is the treatment of choice when an AAA reaches a certain size. Surgery for AAA has been performed for almost 50 years and is a successful and lasting procedure. During surgery, the weakened portion of the aorta is replaced with a Dacron or Teflon graft that is carefully matched and sewn into place. The incision is on the abdomen or the flank.

A new type of surgery called endovascular grafting technology involves minimal surgery and shorter hospital stays. This type of surgery allows the vascular surgeon to repair the AAA by delivering a graft inside the blood vessels through a small incision in each groin. Endovascular grafting is not possible for every AAA.

How can I prevent an abdominal aortic aneurysm?

Quit smoking. Keep your blood pressure under control. Have a screening exam if you are at increased risk for AAA.

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