

Important Information for You and Your Family

A FAMILY HISTORY OF ABDOMINAL AORTIC ANEURYSM (AAA) DISEASE



Have you been diagnosed with AAA disease?

There is a 15% chance that one of your family members will also develop AAA disease.¹ Learning about AAA disease and talking about the importance of early screening with family and friends could save someone's life.



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AAA disease can lead to sudden death. Most patients with a ruptured aneurysm do not survive emergency treatment.

AAA disease progression

Figure A



The aorta is the largest blood vessel. It carries blood from the heart to vital organs throughout the body.

Normal aorta

Figure B



AAA disease weakens the vessel until it bulges like a balloon. This bulge is called an aneurysm.

Aorta with large abdominal aneurysm

Figure C



If left undetected and untreated, large aneurysms can rupture, leading to massive bleeding, and, in some cases, sudden death. Only 10% to 25% of patients with a ruptured AAA survive until hospital discharge.

Many people with AAA disease do not feel any symptoms. Their aneurysms may grow and rupture without warning.


AAA is a potentially deadly condition. Fortunately, it is often treatable and can be diagnosed with a simple screening test.

Risk factors of AAA disease

Millions of Americans are at risk for AAA disease.

People over 50 years old who have any of the following risk factors should be encouraged to talk to a doctor about being screened:

- A family history of AAA disease
- A history of smoking
- Cardiovascular disease, heart attack, bypass surgery, cardiac stent, or peripheral artery disease
- High blood pressure



AAA disease is the third leading cause of sudden death in men over 60 years old.

Diagnosing AAA disease early is a major key to survival

AAA disease can be detected through a simple, painless ultrasound

In this process, a healthcare professional glides a sensor over the stomach area to view images of the aorta. This painless procedure usually takes just a few minutes and is an effective way to detect AAA disease.

AAA treatment options

There are several ways to manage AAA disease when it is found early. A vascular specialist will determine the best course of treatment depending on the size and shape of the aneurysm. One of the following may be recommended:

- **“Watchful waiting”:** The patient may be monitored every 6 to 12 months for changes in the size of the aneurysm
- **Open surgical repair:** Through an abdominal incision, a surgeon replaces the section of the aorta where the aneurysm has formed with a synthetic fabric tube (graft)
- **Endovascular stent grafting:** A less-invasive alternative to open surgical repair. The surgeon places a synthetic fabric tube (graft), supported by a metal scaffold (stent), inside the aneurysm



Sharing the information in this brochure could save lives

Keep these points in mind:

- People with a parent, brother, sister, son, or daughter with AAA disease are at a higher risk for developing AAA disease
- Most people with AAA disease experience no signs or symptoms
- Early detection saves lives
- Screening is easy and painless
- Aneurysms can be treated if caught early



Glossary of Terms

Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA): An enlargement or bulging of a weakened area of the abdominal aorta.

Aorta: The largest artery in the body that carries blood away from the heart and throughout the body.

Asymptomatic: Showing no signs or symptoms detectable by a person with the disease.

Atherosclerosis: A hardening of the arteries caused by a build up of fatty deposits.

Endovascular stent graft: A synthetic fabric tube structure (graft) supported by a metal stent placed in the aneurysm without surgically opening the surrounding tissue.

Family history: A record of current and past illnesses of parents, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters. A family history shows the pattern of certain diseases in a family and helps determine the risk of the disease developing in other family members.

Less invasive: A surgical approach utilizing small incisions, potentially leading to less trauma to the body, less blood loss, smaller surgical scars, and less need for pain medication.

Noninvasive: A medical technique that involves no cutting of the skin.

Open surgical repair: An incision is made in the abdomen to access the aorta from the outside where the weakened part of the aorta (aneurysm) is replaced by a sewn-in fabric tube (graft).

Ruptured AAA: A burst or tear in the aneurysm that can lead to massive internal bleeding and often death.

Ultrasound screening: A noninvasive technique that creates a 2-dimensional image using high-frequency sound waves. It is used to examine internal body structures.



As with any disease, only your doctor can determine proper diagnosis and treatment.

Reference: 1. Darling RC III, Brewster DC, Darling RC, et al. Are familial abdominal aortic aneurysms different? *J Vasc Surg.* 1989;10(1):39-43.

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