

# Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

An aneurysm occurs when part of a blood vessel (artery) or cardiac chamber swells. Either the blood vessel is damaged or there is a weakness in the wall of the blood vessel. When the blood pressure builds it puts stress on the weakened area of the blood vessel and causes the region to swell. The "ballooning" can range from mild to severe and can extend along the vessel. If left unchecked the aneurysm can grow and increase the risk of rupture leading to hemorrhage, and other complications, including death.

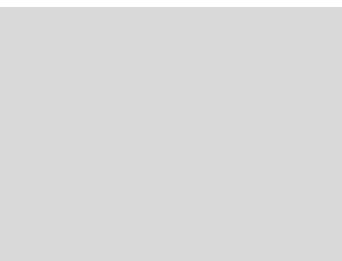
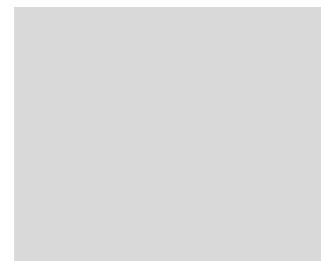
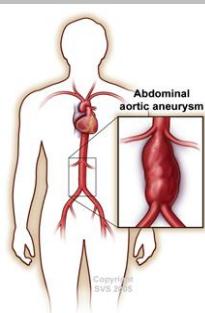
An aneurysm can occur in any part of the body however they tend to most commonly occur on the wall of the aorta, the large trunk artery that carries blood from the left ventricle of the heart to all parts of the body.

Often, there are no major symptoms that accompany an Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA). In fact, most AAA's are discovered from diagnostic tests such as x-rays, ultrasound, or CAT scans that were given for other health problems. Many aneurysms can be detected by a carefully performed abdominal examination by a physician, but many cannot be felt especially if the patient is overweight. Most are diagnosed today using a simple, outpatient abdominal ultrasound scan. The test identifies the AAA and can also measure the size and shape of the AAA which is very important when deciding the best course of treatment.

Notify your physician that you are at risk if:

- You are over 65 years old
- Smoke
- Have a family history of AAA
- Have high blood pressure, or
- Have a history of heart disease.

When AAA's are found early, treatment is generally safe, effective and the aneurysm is cured.



## Abdominal Ultrasound Scan



All individuals at risk for AAA should control high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stop smoking, and avoid weight gain and inactivity. Regular checking by ultrasound, beginning at age 45-50, is essential for early diagnosis. Be sure to remind your doctor of your risks and the need for an ultrasound or other diagnostic test.

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