



Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Warning Signs

The abdominal aorta is the largest blood vessel in the body. It is the main artery stemming from the heart. An abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) is an enlargement in the lining of that blood vessel. As the lining gets weaker, primarily due to age and other risk factors, the vessel wall becomes thinner and expands.

Aortic aneurysms are frequently only discovered when they start to, or have, dissected (ruptured). Unfortunately, many people who have aortic aneurysms do not experience any type of symptoms. Awareness of the symptoms and abdominal aortic aneurysm screening may identify life threatening problems early enough to take corrective action.

The most common abdominal aortic aneurysm warning signs are:

- Intense back or abdominal pain
- Rapid pulse
- Nausea and vomiting
- Excessive sweating
- Volumetric shock from aneurysm leaking

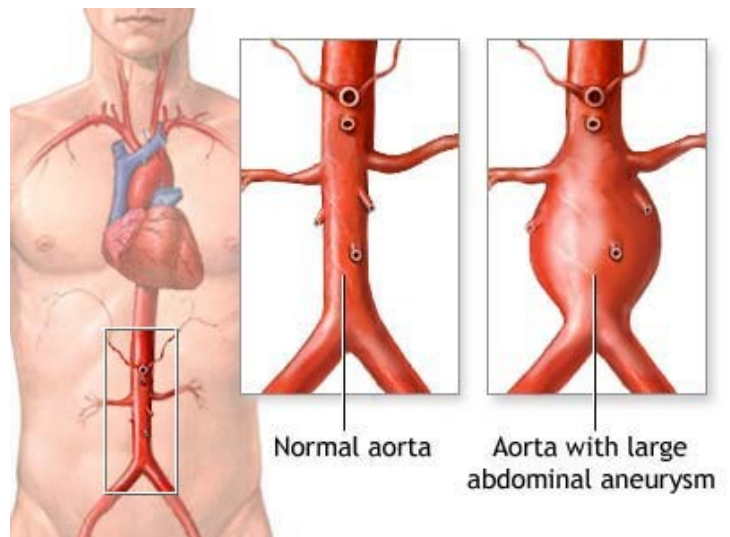
Contributing factors that can lead to an abdominal aortic aneurysm can be classified as *Controllable* and *Uncontrollable*:

Controllable Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Risk Factors:

- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis)

Uncontrollable Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Risk Factors:

- Age
- Gender - men are more prone to this disease
- Family history



The most common location for an abdominal aortic aneurysm is below the area where the aorta divides to supply blood to the kidneys and above where it divides to supply blood to the pelvis and legs.

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Warning Signs (continued)

When an aneurysm is discovered, its size is measured in diameter and then it is closely monitored for growth. If the aneurysm grows beyond five (5) centimeters in diameter, surgical repair may be indicated.

If an aneurysm ruptures, it causes catastrophic bleeding - **and results in a fatality 80% of the time.** (An estimated 30,000 Americans die each year from ruptured AAA.)

Ultrasound and CT imaging can be used to diagnose and follow abdominal aortic aneurysms.

Ultrasound is less expensive and offers minimal radiation, while CT provides a 3-D visualization of the aneurysm and allows accurate anatomical pre-operative planning and post-operative follow up if surgery is required.

Many AA aneurysms are discovered incidentally as part of another imaging procedure/exam. These include virtual colonoscopy (VC), CT enteroscopy, abdominal ultrasound, coronary artery calcium scoring, and aortogram.

When aortic aneurysms are diagnosed early, the treatment is safe and effective and the aneurysm is cured! Surgery may be required to repair an AAA, but modern, catheter-based technologies using endovascular grafts have made treatment less invasive in many cases.

The combination of early diagnosis and modern treatment of aortic aneurysms can save countless lives lost due to aneurysm rupture each year.

Fortunately, awareness of the risk factors, the warning signs and early detection can greatly reduce and/or eliminate the fatal aspects of abdominal aortic aneurysms.

Information for this document obtained from WebMD, AHA, ACC, ASVS, NIH, ACR, Aunt Minnie and Radiology.com

