

Abdominal aortic aneurysm: diagnosis and management

Information for the public
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Abdominal aortic aneurysm: the care you should expect

The aorta is the main blood vessel that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body. An aneurysm is when a weakness in the wall of the blood vessel makes it bulge outwards – if this happens where the aorta passes through the abdomen (tummy area) it's called an abdominal aortic aneurysm ('triple A' or AAA).

This type of aneurysm can take a long time to develop and often has no symptoms. But if it's not spotted it can eventually burst (rupture). This is very serious because it causes severe bleeding and can be fatal. Abdominal aortic aneurysms are rare, but some people are more likely to have them, particularly men over 65. However, with a simple test people can be diagnosed and get care and advice about it early.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with or at risk of having AAA by making sure:

- doctors encourage men aged 66 or over and women aged 70 or over to get tested if they are at risk, for example if they have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, high blood pressure, or they smoke (the guideline has a [full list of people who should get tested](#))
- people have support to fully understand the different options to deal with AAA when it is spotted – including that monitoring rather than treatment may be best to start with
- people being monitored also get advice to improve their health and slow the AAA from growing, including lifestyle advice and treatment for high blood pressure if they need it
- people have the most effective treatment for their AAA if they need it.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you?
- What do you want to get out of any treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you more than others?
- How will the condition and its treatment affect your day to day life?
- What happens if you don't want to have treatment?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about abdominal aortic aneurysm.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [British Heart Foundation](#), 0300 330 3311
- [Circulation Foundation](#), 020 7205 7151

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by an abdominal aortic aneurysm and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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