Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening

Information for men invited for screening by the
NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening Programme



NHS
Screening Programmes
Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

This leaflet provides information about abdominal aortic aneurysm screening (also called AAA screening) for men who have been invited for screening by the national screening programme.

AAA screening is a simple ultrasound test which the NHS offers free of charge to all men in the year they turn 65. This leaflet explains AAA screening and will help you decide whether you want to go for screening.

What is an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)?

The aorta is the main blood vessel that supplies blood to your body. It runs from your heart down through your chest and abdomen.

In some people, as they get older, the wall of the aorta in the abdomen can become weak. It can then start to expand and form what is called an abdominal aortic aneurysm.

The condition is most common in men aged 65 and above.

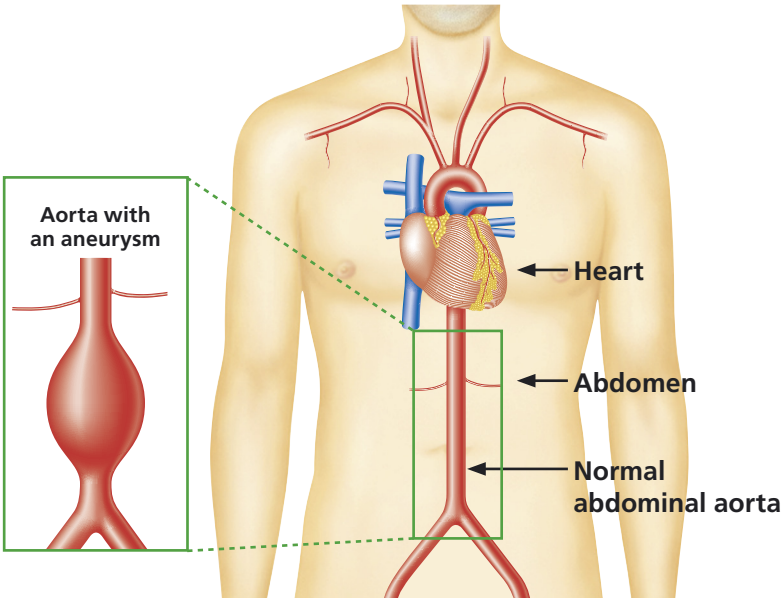


Diagram to show a normal aorta and an aorta with an aneurysm

Is an abdominal aortic aneurysm serious?

Large aneurysms are rare but can be very serious. As the wall of the aorta stretches it becomes weaker and could give way. If this happens, the person usually dies.

An aorta which is only slightly larger than normal is not dangerous. However, it is still important to know about it so that we can monitor the aneurysm to see if it gets bigger.

Why is screening important?

If you have an aneurysm you will not generally notice any symptoms. This means that you cannot tell if you have one, as you will not feel any pain or notice anything different.

We offer screening so we can find aneurysms early and monitor or treat them. This greatly reduces the chances of the aneurysm causing serious problems.

The easiest way to find out if you have an aneurysm is to have an ultrasound scan of your abdomen.



Why have I been invited for screening?

If you are a man aged over 65 you are more likely to have an abdominal aortic aneurysm. This is why the NHS invites all men for screening during the year they turn 65.

Who is most at risk?

Men are six times more likely to have this type of aneurysm than women. The chance of having an aneurysm increases with age.

Your chance of having an abdominal aortic aneurysm can also increase if:

- You smoke
- You have high blood pressure
- Your brother, sister or parent has, or has had, an abdominal aortic aneurysm

How common is the condition?

It is estimated that around 1 in 25 men aged between 65 and 74 in England have an abdominal aortic aneurysm. This is about 4% of men in the age group.

What will happen when I go for screening?

We use a simple test called an ultrasound scan to look for an aneurysm. This is very quick and usually lasts less than 10 minutes.

At the clinic we will check your personal details, explain the scan and give you the chance to ask any questions.



We will then ask you to lie down and lift up or unbutton your shirt. You will not need to undress. We will put a cool jelly on your abdomen.

We will then move a small scanner over the skin of your abdomen. The scan will show a picture of the aorta on a screen and we will be able to measure it.

We will tell you your result straight away and also send a copy of the result to your GP.



There are four possible results from the scan:

Normal

If your aorta is **less than 3cm wide**, this means the aorta is **not enlarged** (there is no aneurysm). **Most men have a normal result.** No treatment or monitoring is needed afterwards. We will not invite you for AAA screening again.

Small aneurysm found

If your aorta is **between 3cm and 4.4cm wide**, you have a small aneurysm. We invite men with a **small aneurysm** back for scans every 12 months to check if it is getting bigger.

Medium aneurysm found

If your aorta is **between 4.5cm and 5.4cm wide**, you have a **medium aneurysm**. We invite men with a medium aneurysm back for scans every 3 months to check if it is getting bigger.

Large aneurysm found

If your aorta is **5.5cm wide or bigger**, you have a large aneurysm. **Only about 1 in 100 men who are screened have a large aneurysm.** We give men with a large aneurysm an appointment with a specialist team to have more scans and talk about possible treatment, usually an operation.

What happens if I have a small or medium aneurysm?

You will not need to have treatment at this stage. However, it is important to monitor the size of the aneurysm as you might need treatment if it gets bigger.

Most aneurysms get bigger very slowly, so many men with a small or medium aneurysm will never need treatment.

We will invite you to come back for scans every year if you have a small aneurysm or every three months if you have a medium aneurysm.

We will give you advice on reducing the chance of the aneurysm getting larger. Your GP may also want to give you tablets or review your current medication. They may also want to monitor your blood pressure.

What happens if I have a large aneurysm?

If we find a large aneurysm, we will refer you to a specialist team. They will carry out some more tests and a specialist will discuss possible treatment with you. This is usually an operation.

Treatment for aneurysms that are found using screening is very effective. There are risks from treatment which will be explained in detail by the specialist.

Not everyone who has a large aneurysm will have an operation.

Will AAA screening pick up other problems?

No. Screening is just to see if you have an abdominal aortic aneurysm. **It does not look for other problems**. If you are worried about any medical problem you should speak to your GP.

How reliable is the scan?

The scan used to find aneurysms is very reliable. No screening test can be completely effective, but it is very rare for a man who has had a normal result to develop a large aneurysm.

Sometimes the person carrying out the scan will not be able to see the aorta clearly. This is nothing to worry about and they will ask you to have another scan, usually on a different day.

What are the risks?

There is no risk from the scan itself.

However, a small proportion of men who are screened (about 1 in 10,000) will not survive surgery for an aneurysm that was detected through screening, but which may never have burst if it had been left untreated.

Screening does not completely remove the risk of an aneurysm bursting, but it is the best method of protection against this condition.



What about men over 65?

If you are over 65 and have never been invited for AAA screening, you can ask for a scan by contacting your local screening programme.

Where can I find more information?

- The **AAA Screening Patient Decision Aid** can help you decide if you want to take up the offer of AAA screening. Visit **aaa.screening.nhs.uk/decisionaid** or contact your local screening programme
- The phone number for your **local screening programme** is on the letter inviting you for screening
- You can find information about the **NHS AAA Screening Programme** at **aaa.screening.nhs.uk** or by emailing **aaa.screening@nhs.net**
- **The Circulation Foundation** is a charity that supports people with diseases of the veins and arteries, known as vascular diseases, including abdominal aortic aneurysms. You can find more information at **www.circulationfoundation.org.uk**
- You can also speak to your **GP**

This information is available in other languages and formats, including easy read, large print and audio at http://aaa.screening.nhs.uk.

You can scan this QR code with your smartphone to visit our mobile website.

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