

Protect Yourself from an Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Rupture

It is estimated that more than one million people are living with undiagnosed abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) and at least 95% of these can be successfully treated if detected prior to rupture. Who should be concerned?

Risk Factors for Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Include:

- Individuals over 60-years-old, particularly males
- Have a history of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries)
- Have a family history of AAA
- Smoking
- High Blood Pressure
- Chronic lung disease

AAAs can be permanently cured when diagnosed early. But if left untreated the AAA can rupture. In most situations, the people with ruptured aortic aneurysms die before they reach a hospital. Talk to your doctor about your risk for AAA and whether you should be tested.

The Vascular Center of Northern Michigan offers a safe, painless, noninvasive, ultrasound test that can accurately measure the size of the aneurysm to determine the need for treatment. In addition, Medicare offers a one-time, free screening for AAA to qualified seniors as part of its Welcome to Medicare physical. The physical must be conducted within the first six months of enrollment in Medicare. Men, who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes during their life, and men and women with family history of AAA, qualify for the Medicare screening.

The aorta is the body's largest artery and carries oxygen-rich blood from the heart to all vital organs, and legs, and feet. AAA occurs when the wall of the aorta progressively weakens and begins to bulge. An AAA may continue to enlarge and eventually rupture if it is left untreated, causing severe internal bleeding and possible death.

Although AAA has few symptoms, some patients report:

- A pulse feeling in their abdomen
- Unexplained, severe pain in their abdomen or lower back
- Pain, discoloration, or sores on their feet (this is a rare symptom)

Maintaining good vascular health is a matter of life and limb. If you have evidence of AAA, see Dr. Colburn or Dr. Boros, both vascular surgeons who have the expertise to give the best diagnosis and treat with noninvasive treatments and other procedures.