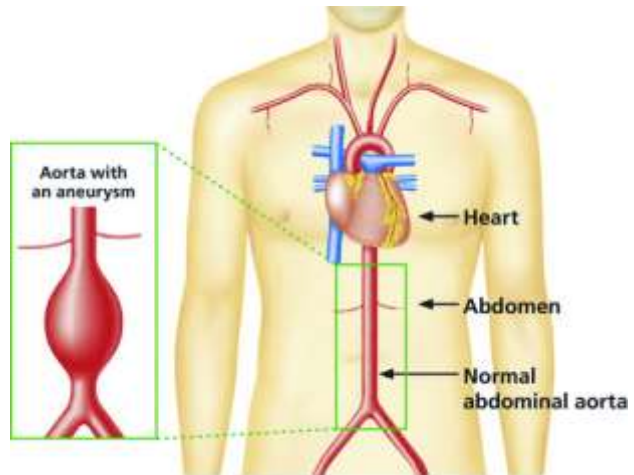


Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening is a way of detecting a dangerous swelling (aneurysm) of the aorta – the main blood vessel that runs from the heart, down through the abdomen to the rest of the body.

This swelling is far more common in men aged over 65 than it is in women and younger men, so men are invited for screening in the year they turn 65. This policy has only been in place nationally since 2013 – so if you are older than 68 you may not have been contacted. You can, however, refer yourself.



An AAA usually causes no symptoms, but if it bursts, it's extremely dangerous and usually fatal. Around 8 out of 10 people with a ruptured AAA either die before they reach hospital or don't survive surgery. Screening involves a simple ultrasound scan of your stomach (abdomen), which takes about 10-15 minutes. This scan is similar to that given to pregnant women – not the sort where they put you inside a machine!

If your abdominal aorta is not enlarged, you don't ever need to be tested again. If you have a small to medium aneurysm, you'll be regularly monitored to check it doesn't get dangerously larger. If you are found to have a large aneurysm, you'll be seen by a vascular surgeon within two weeks. They will advise on whether you would benefit from treatment to reduce the risk of it bursting.

In general, if you have an AAA, you won't know. You probably won't feel any pain or notice anything different, but if the aneurysm bursts, it's a medical emergency and most people either die before they reach hospital or don't survive surgery. Screening is a way of detecting an aneurysm early. If a large aneurysm is detected before it bursts it can be treated. Accepting the invitation to screening cuts the risk of dying from an abdominal aortic aneurysm by about half.

If, as my husband did, you would like to be screened - you can visit the website www.nhs.uk/aaa and enter your postcode - you can email PHE.screeninghelpdesk@nhs.net and ask for a referral - or telephone: 020 3682 0890

Wendy Hattrell