

Information about a health scan
for men who are 65 or older




EASY
READ

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening (AAA)

This scan shows a picture inside your tummy.
An AAA is a swelling in the blood vessel from
your heart to your tummy.

 Health and
Social Care

 Public Health
Agency

 Abdominal Aortic
Aneurysm Screening



What is in this booklet?

To help you understand the messages in this booklet, you may need a carer or friend to read it with you. (We use the word **aneurysm** to mean AAA throughout the booklet.)

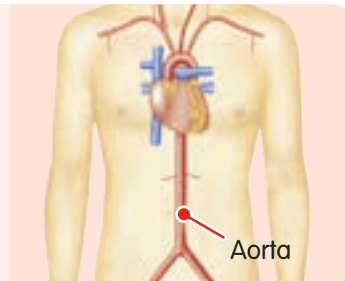
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What is an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)?

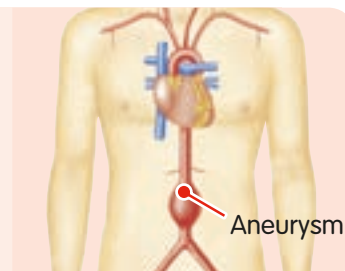


Abdominal means your tummy. **Aortic** means the blood vessel from your heart to your tummy. **Aneurysm** means a swelling.

The aorta is a big blood vessel that takes blood from your heart around your body.



As some people get older, the aorta can get weak and swell up. This sort of swelling is called an aneurysm.



You have more chance of having an aneurysm if you are a man aged 65 or over.



You can have a scan of your tummy to check for an aneurysm. If we find an aneurysm we will keep checking it. If the aneurysm is big you will be offered treatment.



Who is most at risk of having an aneurysm?



Around 1 in 65 men screened in Northern Ireland at age 65 have an abdominal aortic aneurysm.



Men are 6 times more likely to have an aneurysm than women.



Your chance of having an aneurysm is more:

- if you smoke
- if you have high blood pressure
- if your brother, sister or parent has had an aneurysm
- If you have high cholesterol



Abdominal aortic aneurysm causes 80-100 deaths in Northern Ireland every year.



Is an aneurysm serious?



The aorta is the largest blood vessel in the body and is usually around 2cm wide – roughly the size of a pound coin.

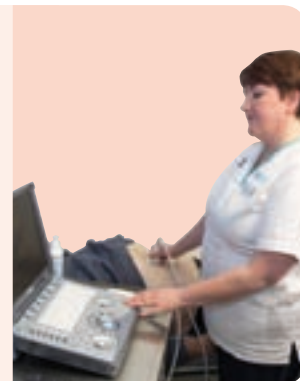
THIS SIZE



However, it can swell to over 5.5cm which is roughly the size of a lime.



If you have a small aneurysm it is not serious. If you have a medium aneurysm this might become serious. It is important to keep checking if your aneurysm is getting bigger.



If you have a large aneurysm it could be very serious. If the wall of your aorta gets very weak it could burst. If this happens, you would probably die.



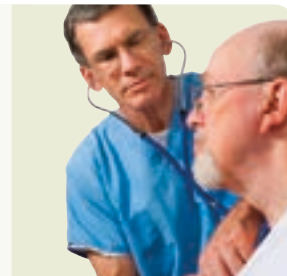
Why is it important to have an AAA scan?



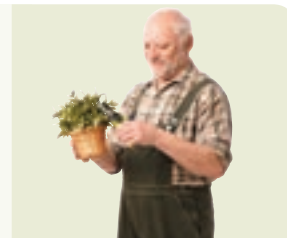
Most aneurysms are found when people have the AAA tummy scan.



Sometimes your doctor may find an aneurysm when they are doing other health checks.



You may not know if you have an aneurysm. You will not usually feel any pain or notice anything different.



This is why all men are invited for a scan when they reach 65 or older.



Women and men under 65 are not invited for screening. However, if you feel you have an increased risk of having an aneurysm, talk to your GP who can still refer you for a scan.



What will happen at the AAA scan?



At your appointment we will tell you about the scan and give you the chance to ask questions. We will also ask to keep information about you on our computer system.



We use a simple scan called an ultrasound scan. The scan usually takes less than 10 minutes. The scan does not hurt. The scan measures the size of your abdominal aorta.



For the scan you lie down and lift up or open your shirt. You do not need to undress.



We put a cool jelly on your tummy and move a small scanner over your skin. This shows us a picture of your aorta on a screen and we can measure it.



We will tell you your result straight away and also tell your own doctor.



The results

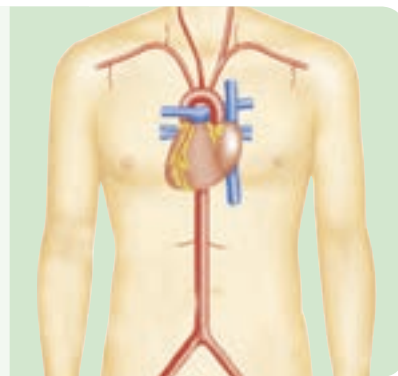
Normal



There are 3 results you could have from the test.

1. **Normal**
2. **Small or medium aneurysm**
3. **Large aneurysm**

Normal means you do not have an abdominal aortic aneurysm.



You will not need any treatment or checks afterwards.



Most men will have a normal result. If the result is normal it will probably stay normal. This means you are unlikely to get a large aneurysm later in life.

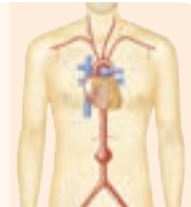


The results

Small or medium aneurysm



If we find a small or medium aneurysm it means that your aorta is a bit wider than normal.



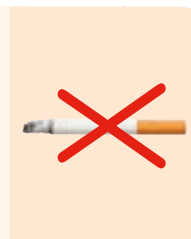
You will not need treatment now. But it is important to keep checking in case your aneurysm gets bigger.



If you have a small or medium aneurysm we will ask you to come back for regular scans. The scans will be every 3 months or once a year. It will depend on how big your aneurysm is.



We will also give you advice on what you can do to help stop your aneurysm getting bigger, such as stopping smoking.



Your doctor may give you tablets or change the medicines you already take. They will also check your blood pressure.



Many men with a small or medium aneurysm never need any treatment.

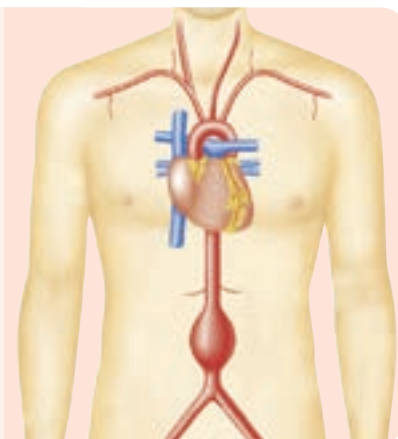


The results

Large aneurysm



If we find a large aneurysm it means that your aorta is much wider than normal.



If you have a large aneurysm we will arrange for you to have more tests and talk to a special doctor about treatment. The treatment will usually be an operation.



Treatment for a large aneurysm usually stops the problem. But there are some risks which the doctor will tell you about.



What can I do to stay healthy and help stop an aneurysm?



Stop smoking



Eat a healthy diet



Take less salt



Exercise for about 30 minutes every day



Have your blood pressure checked



Have your cholesterol checked



Attend for your annual health check

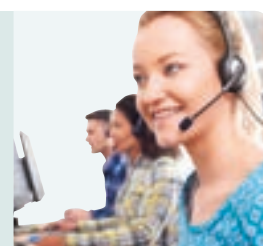


Where can I get more information?



To get more information you can:

Phone the screening programme office using the number on the letter we sent you. Tel: 028 9063 1828



Talk to your own doctor. Attend for your annual health check.



Visit the AAA Screening Programme at www.aaascreening.info



Contact the Circulation Foundation charity that supports people with problems with their blood vessels, at www.circulationfoundation.org.uk



Contact the Stop Smoking Specialists www.publichealth.hscni.net



This booklet has been designed by Brea Crothers and Marie Loughran (Health Facilitators for adults with Learning Disability SHSCT) with the help of men with a learning disability, colleagues from the NI AAA Screening Programme, colleagues from other Trusts in N Ireland as well as the PHA and the HSCB.