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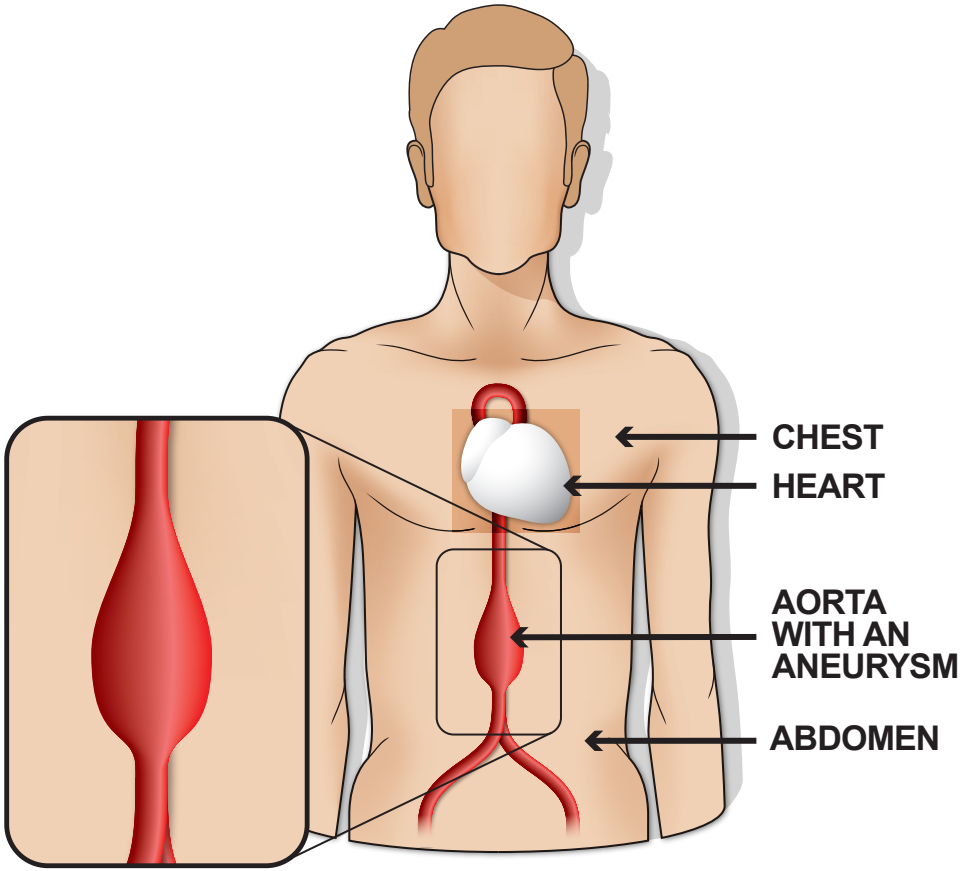


Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening

A free NHS check for men aged 65 and over

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet provides information on abdominal aortic aneurysm screening (also called AAA screening) for men aged 65 and over.

It explains what an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) is and what happens when you go for screening. It should help you decide if you want to be screened.

The AAA screening check is a simple free ultrasound scan.

Who can be screened?

The NHS invites all men for screening in the year they turn 65.

What about men aged over 65?

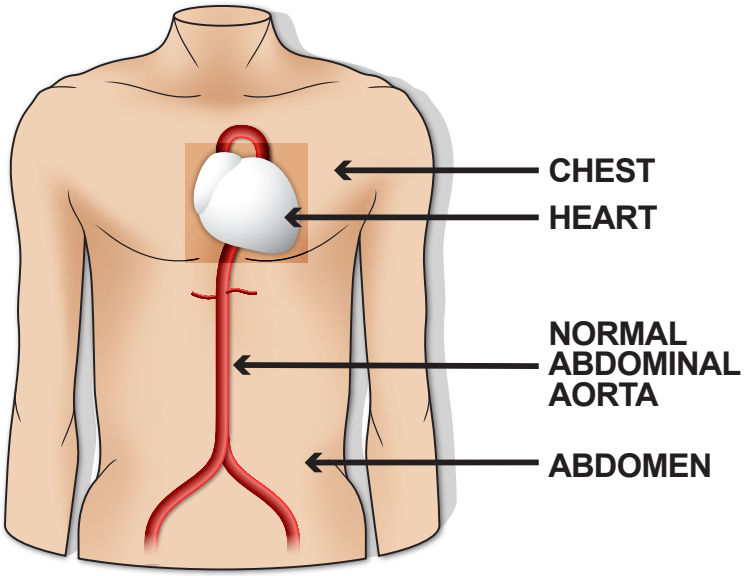
Men aged over 65 who have not been screened before can contact their local service to arrange a test.

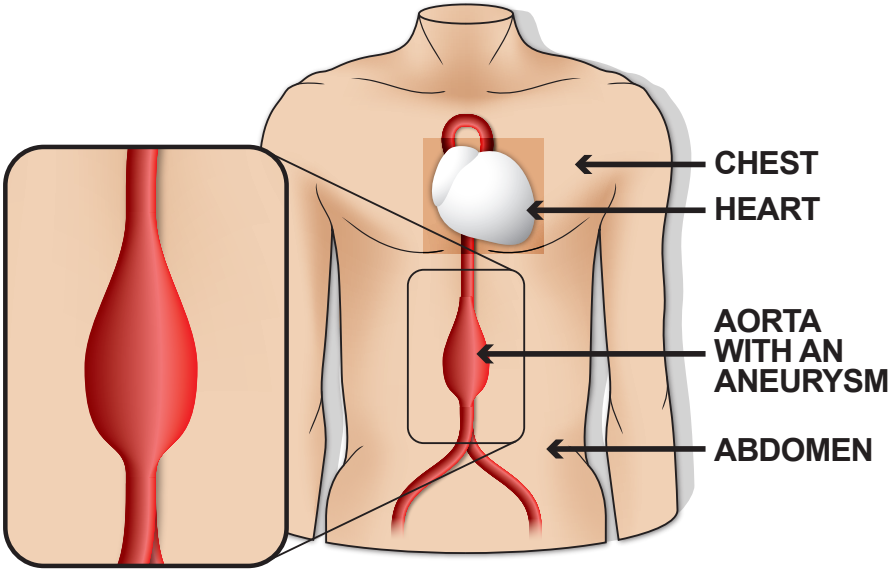
What is an abdominal aortic aneurysm?

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 an abdominal aortic aneurysm.

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


CHEST
HEART
NORMAL ABDOMINAL AORTA
ABDOMEN


CHEST
HEART
AORTA WITH AN ANEURYSM
ABDOMEN

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 can burst, causing internal bleeding. Around 85 out of 100 people die when an aneurysm bursts.

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 check if the aneurysm is getting bigger.

Why is screening important?

If you have an aneurysm you will not usually notice any symptoms. This means you cannot tell if you have one, will not feel any pain and will probably not 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.

How common is the condition?

Around 1 in 70 men who are screened have an abdominal aortic aneurysm.

Who is most at risk?

Men are **six times** more likely to have an abdominal aortic aneurysm than women, which is why women are not offered screening. The chance of having an aneurysm increases with age.

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

- **you are or have ever been a smoker**
- **you have high blood pressure**
- **your brother, sister or parent has, or has had, an abdominal aortic aneurysm**

What will happen when I go for screening?

We use a simple ultrasound scan, similar to that offered to pregnant women. 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 ask you to lie down and lift up or unbutton your shirt. You will not need to undress. We will put a cool gel on your abdomen.

We will then slide the scanning sensor over your skin. The scan will show a picture of the aorta on a screen and we will measure it.

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

Your personal information

You must be able to give your consent:

1. **to be screened**
2. **for your personal information to be used by the screening programme to provide a safe service**

By law, everyone working in, or on behalf of, the NHS must respect your privacy and keep all information about you safe. The NHS Constitution sets out how the NHS should handle your records to protect your privacy. In addition there are laws in place to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

For information on how NHS screening programmes use patient information safely and securely, visit **www.gov.uk/phe/screening-data**.

There are four possible results:

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

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

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

If your aorta is **5.5cm wide or bigger**, you have a large aneurysm. **Only about 1 in 1,000 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 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 practice may also want to give you tablets or review your current medication. They may also want to check 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 typically an operation, usually arranged within a few weeks if you decide you want it.

During the time when a large AAA is untreated, you may need to stop driving and to check health-related insurance, such as travel insurance.

Treatment for aneurysms that are found using screening is usually 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.

What are the risks?

There is no risk from the scan itself.

However, around 54 out of every 10,000 men screened will eventually have surgery to repair an aneurysm. On average, one of these 54 men will not survive the operation but their aneurysm may never have burst if left untreated.

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

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 practice.

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.

Where can I find more information?

- If you have been invited for screening, the phone number for your local screening service is on your appointment letter
- You can find information about the NHS AAA Screening Programme and contact details for your local service at ***www.nhs.uk/aaa***
- The Circulation Foundation supports people with diseases of the veins and arteries, known as vascular diseases, including abdominal aortic aneurysms. ***www.circulationfoundation.org.uk***
- The British Heart Foundation: ***www.bhf.org.uk***
- You can also speak to your GP practice

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Reference AAA01

Web address **www.nhs.uk/aaa**

Public Health England leads the NHS Screening Programmes