

Your result shows a large abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) that may need surgery



**What happens
now?**



A quick, free and painless scan for men aged 65 and over

Your screening result

We found that a section of your aorta is much wider than normal.

This means you have a large abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) that that may need treatment – usually surgery.

Around 1 in 1000 men screened has a large AAA. This condition has almost certainly been present for some time, developing very slowly.

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet tells you:

- what an AAA is
- what your AAA screening result means
- what other tests or treatment you may need.

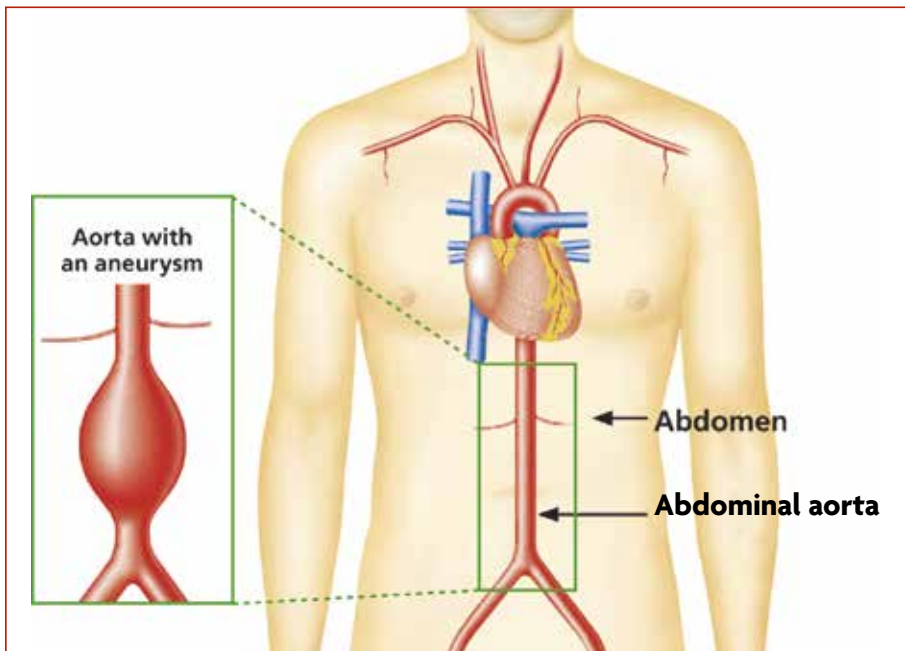


Diagram courtesy of the English NHS AAA Screening Programme

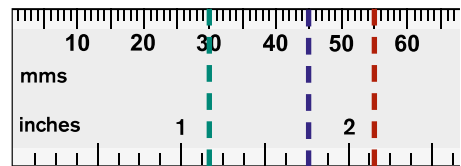
What is an AAA?

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

As some people get older, the wall of the aorta in the abdomen can become weak and balloon out to form an aneurysm, rather like a bulge in a worn car tyre. This is called an abdominal aortic aneurysm.

An aneurysm is present if a section of the aorta within the abdomen is 30mm or more wide. Occasionally an AAA may grow to 55mm or more wide. This is a large AAA. At this point, there is a significant risk of the artery wall bursting and bleeding into the abdomen. This is a serious emergency.

Small AAA	30mm – 44mm
Medium AAA	45mm – 54mm
Large AAA	55mm or above



Why do we get AAAs?

The risk of developing an AAA depends on your age and genes. Around 1 in 80 men aged 65 in Northern Ireland has an AAA. The risk of having an AAA increases if your brother, sister or parent has, or has had, an abdominal aortic aneurysm.

Smoking, high cholesterol and high blood pressure are known to increase the size of AAAs and the risk associated with them.

Is a large AAA serious?

A large AAA is serious because the wall of the aorta can burst as it stretches. A burst aneurysm leads to serious internal bleeding, which can be fatal.

What happens next?

You will be contacted by a vascular nurse specialist within one working day of your diagnosis. They will give you advice on your general health and how other conditions may affect your aneurysm.

If you have any immediate concerns, you can contact the screening programme office on 028 9615 1212. You can also contact your GP.

You will be sent a letter with an appointment to meet a team of specialists (a hospital vascular team) who will offer expert advice and assess you for surgery. This appointment will usually take place within two weeks of your scan. **Please ensure that you are available during this period** and change any travel plans you may have. If you change address in the meantime, please inform the screening programme office on 028 9615 1212.

We will also write to your GP with the result of your scan. They will be notified of your appointment with the team of specialists when it has been arranged.

Close family

You should inform any brothers, sisters or children that your AAA means that they are also at risk. They can ask their GP about the possibility of requesting a scan at an age 5 years earlier than the age at which your AAA was found.



Driving

Car drivers and motorcyclists:

- You must inform the DVA if your AAA grows to 60mm or more wide.
- You will be suspended from driving if it reaches 65mm or more.

Taxi, minibus, bus, coach, lorry and HGV drivers:

- **You must inform the DVA if you have an AAA of any size.**
- You will be suspended from driving if it reaches 55mm or more wide.

Ask your doctor or consultant if you're not sure.

All licences may be reinstated when the aneurysm has been successfully treated.

Health-related Insurance

As with any medical condition, **you should inform your insurers as soon as possible**, including your travel insurance provider.

What happens at the appointment with the team of specialists?

The specialists:

- will ask you about your medical history
- will carry out an examination of your abdomen
- may arrange further tests on your heart, lungs and kidneys to assess your general health
- will talk to you about the risks and benefits of surgery.

After being assessed by the specialists, you may be offered an operation to treat your large AAA. The few men who are not suitable for surgery will be given advice on a healthier lifestyle and will have the opportunity to ask the specialists any questions they may have.

What happens in the operation?

An operation on a large AAA detected through screening may require major abdominal surgery or may sometimes mean inserting a stent through a small incision in the groin. The operation requires a stay in hospital and is usually very effective.

Do I need to have an operation?

For most men diagnosed with a large AAA, surgery is the most effective treatment, but having an operation is your choice. If you do not wish to have an operation, the specialists will discuss this with you.

Are there any risks in having an operation?

AAA surgery carries significant risks, as with any major operation. On average, 98% of men survive surgery. The chances of recovery are much better than if the issue is ignored and the aneurysm later bursts. A burst aneurysm leads to serious internal bleeding, which is fatal in 8 out of 10 cases.

What if I do not have an operation?

For a small number of men, an operation may have very high risks. This is usually when they have other serious medical conditions. In these situations, surgery for the aneurysm may not be appropriate and the best advice is to live a healthier lifestyle. A known large AAA left untreated may have wider implications, for example in relation to driving (see previous page).

Can I do anything to stop the AAA getting bigger?

Living a healthier lifestyle may slow the growth of your aneurysm. The following general recommendations may be helpful, particularly if surgery is being considered:

- If you are a smoker, stop smoking. Visit www.stopsmokingni.info for information and advice on stopping smoking, and details of your nearest free stop smoking service.

- Following an AAA result please arrange a visit to your GP to have your height, weight and blood pressure checked.
- Have a healthy, balanced diet and reduce the amount of fatty food you eat. Visit www.choosetolivebetter.com for further information and advice.
- If you are overweight, try to lose weight.
- If you drink alcohol, reduce the amount you consume.

How will my AAA screening information be used?

The AAA screening programme in Northern Ireland will keep a record of your personal screening information including test results and scan images. Staff working for the programme may see and review your records. Any information relating to you will remain strictly confidential.

The information will be used to monitor and improve the quality of the programme and the expertise of screening staff. This is an important part of any screening programme. It may also be used for audit, research, education and training purposes within Health and Social Care. If this happens, your personal identification details will be removed.

It is important that you are aware of any symptoms of a burst AAA

If you have been diagnosed with a large AAA and have new symptoms of severe, persistent abdominal and/or lower back pain, you should seek immediate medical help through an emergency department. Make sure you tell any medical staff that you have a large AAA detected through screening.

If you contact a health professional for any other reason, you should again let them know that you have a large AAA detected through screening.

How can I find out more?

For more information or this leaflet in another language or format:

- call the AAA screening programme office on **028 9615 1212**;
- visit the websites: **www.nidirect.gov.uk/aaa** and **www.publichealth.hscni.net**
- contact your GP.

You can also get information and support from the Circulation Foundation, a UK charity for people who have vascular diseases. Visit their website at: **www.circulationfoundation.org.uk**



Public Health Agency

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www.publichealth.hscni.net

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