

# Overview

## Abdominal aortic aneurysm

- Overview
- [Treatment](#)

An abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) is a bulge or ballooning of the aorta, the main blood vessel that runs from the heart down through the chest and tummy.

An AAA expands slowly and rarely needs treatment in people under 60 years old.

It can get bigger over time and could burst (rupture), causing life-threatening bleeding.

## Symptoms of an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)

AAAs do not usually cause any obvious symptoms. They are often only picked up during an examination by a GP or more commonly on tests carried out for another reason. Some people with an AAA have a pulsing sensation visible or palpable in the tummy.

An undetected aneurysm most usually presents when it develops a leak or bursts or ruptures and this usually causes sudden or severe pain in the left side of the tummy or back.

If there is severe bleeding this can lead to:

- sudden, severe pain in the tummy or lower back
- dizziness
- sweaty, pale and clammy skin
- a fast heartbeat
- [shortness of breath](#)
- fainting or passing out

## When to get medical help

**Call 999 or 112 for an ambulance immediately if:**

- you or someone else develops symptoms of a burst AAA

Make an appointment to see a GP as soon as possible if you have symptoms, especially if you're at a higher risk of an AAA.

You may get an ultrasound scan of your tummy to check if you have an AAA.

## Who's at risk of an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)

An AAA can form if the sides of the aorta weaken and balloon outwards. It's not always clear why this happens, but there are things that increase the risk.

People at a higher risk of getting an AAA include men aged 60 or over and women aged 65 or over who have one or more of the following risk factors:

- a family history of AAA
- high blood pressure
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- high blood cholesterol
- cardiovascular disease, such as heart disease or a history of stroke
- they smoke or have previously smoked

Speak to a GP if you're worried you may be at risk of an AAA. They may suggest having a scan and making healthy lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of an AAA.

## Treatments for an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)

The recommended treatment for an AAA depends on how big it is.

Treatment is not always needed straight away if the risk of an AAA bursting is low.

Treatment for a:

- small AAA (3cm to 4.4cm) – ultrasound scans are recommended every year to check if it's getting bigger; you'll get advice about healthy lifestyle changes to help stop it growing
- medium AAA (4.5cm to 5.4cm) – ultrasound scans are recommended every 3 to 6 months to check if it's getting bigger; you'll also be advised about healthy lifestyle changes
- large AAA (5.5cm or more) – surgery to stop it getting bigger or bursting is usually recommended

Ask your doctor if you're not sure what size your AAA is.

## Reducing your risk of an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)

The most important thing you can do to prevent an aneurysm or to stop one from getting bigger is to make sure your blood pressure is in normal limits. You can speak to your GP about this if you are concerned. They may recommend taking tablets to treat your blood pressure.

There are several other things you can do to reduce your chances of getting an AAA or help to stop one getting bigger.

These include:

- [stopping smoking](#)
- [eating healthily](#)
- [exercising regularly](#)
- maintaining a healthy weight – use the [healthy weight calculator](#) to see if you need to lose weight, and find out [why diet and nutrition helps your health](#)
- cutting down on alcohol – read [tips for drinking less](#) and general [advice about alcohol](#)

Page last reviewed: 24 March 2021

Next review due: 24 March 2024

Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

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This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

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