

# Your result shows a small abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)

**What  
happens  
now?**



Public Health  
Agency



A quick, free scan for men aged 65

## Your screening result

We found that a section of your aorta is a little wider than normal. This means you have a small abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA).

Around 1 in 55 men who go for screening have a small AAA. We will invite you to have an ultrasound scan **every year** to see if your AAA is getting bigger.

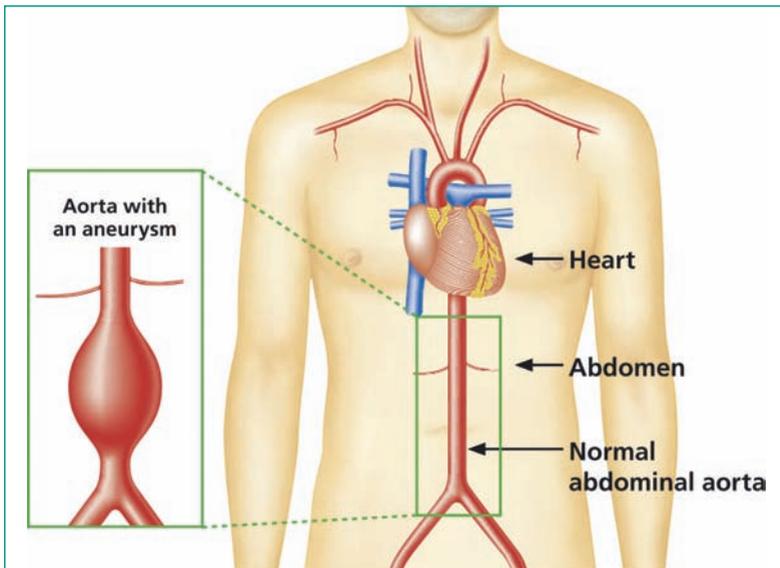
## What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet tells you:

- what an AAA is
- what your AAA screening result means
- what happens next.

## What is an AAA?

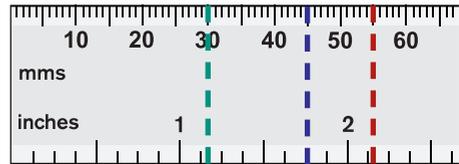
The aorta is the main artery that supplies blood to your body. It runs from your heart down through your chest and abdomen (belly).



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 AAA is present if a section of the aorta within the abdomen is 30mm or more wide. Occasionally an AAA may grow to more than 55mm 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 known as a ruptured AAA.

<b>Small AAA</b>	30mm – 44mm
<b>Medium AAA</b>	45mm – 54mm
<b>Large AAA</b>	55mm or above



## Why do we get AAAs?

The risk of developing an AAA depends on your age and genes. Around 1 in 40 men aged 65 in Northern Ireland have an AAA, and if you are the close relative of an affected person, you are more likely to get one. However, most men are unaware of any family history of AAAs when theirs is detected.

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

## Is a small AAA serious?

**A small AAA is rarely serious.** Most AAAs grow very slowly, so many men with a small AAA may never develop a medium or large AAA.

However, it is important to monitor the size of your AAA regularly in case it gets bigger.

## What happens next?

You will be contacted by a specialist nurse within two working days of your diagnosis. The nurse will give you advice on your general health and how other conditions may affect your small AAA.

You do not need any treatment at present. However, your small AAA should be monitored **once a year** by an ultrasound scan.

It is important to monitor your AAA in case it grows. We will send you a letter with the date of your next appointment. If you change address in the meantime, please inform the central screening office as soon as possible.

## What happens at a monitoring scan?

The monitoring scan will take about 10 minutes. You will be given the result of your scan at the time of the examination. We will also tell your GP about your scan.

## What happens if your AAA increases in size?

If your small AAA grows to become a medium AAA, the frequency of your ultrasound scans will increase to once every three months.

## Can I do anything to stop the AAA getting bigger?

Living a healthier lifestyle may slow the growth of your AAA:

- If you are a smoker, stop smoking. Find the support you need by calling the Smokers Helpline on 0808 812 8008 or visiting [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info)
- Make sure your blood pressure is normal. If you have not had it measured recently, get it checked by your GP.
- Have a healthy, balanced diet and reduce the amount of fatty food and cholesterol you eat.
- If you are overweight, try to lose weight.
- Take regular exercise.
- If you drink alcohol, reduce the amount you consume.



Your GP will be able to give you advice on all of these issues. They may also want to give you tablets and monitor your blood pressure.

You do not need to make any other changes to your lifestyle. You should continue to be physically active and enjoy any hobbies. Contact your GP if you have any concerns. As with any medical condition, you should inform your insurers as soon as possible, including your travel insurance provider.

### **How many times will I need to come back?**

Everyone is different. It is not possible to say exactly how many scans you will need to come back for.

You will not usually need to come back for more scans if, after 15 years, a number of repeat scans have shown that your AAA is not increasing in size. This would mean your AAA is unlikely to cause any problems.

Again, if you change address, you should inform the central screening office as soon as possible.



### Why should I not have an operation now?

All operations have some risks and the operation for an AAA is no different. An operation for a small AAA has a lot more risks than the AAA itself, so the best way to control your small AAA is to live a healthier lifestyle and follow the advice of your GP.

If your small AAA grows to a large AAA, the risk of it rupturing (bursting) can become greater than the risk of an operation, so surgery may then be considered.

### What are the symptoms of a ruptured AAA?

It is extremely unlikely that a small AAA will rupture (burst), but it is important that you are aware of any symptoms of a ruptured AAA. If you have been diagnosed with an AAA and have **new symptoms of severe, persistent abdominal and/or lower back pain**, you should seek immediate medical help through an accident and emergency department. Make sure you tell any medical staff that you have an AAA detected through screening.

## How can I find out more?

For more information about anything in this leaflet:

- contact your GP
- visit [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)
- call the AAA central screening office on 028 9063 1828.

You can also get information and support from the Circulation Foundation. This is a UK charity for people who have diseases of the veins and arteries, known as vascular diseases, including AAAs.

### **Circulation Foundation**

Website: [www.circulationfoundation.org.uk](http://www.circulationfoundation.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7304 4779



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