

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



**What happens  
now?**



Public Health  
Agency



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

## Your screening result

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

**This means you have a large abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) that should be assessed for surgery.**

Around 1 in 800 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.

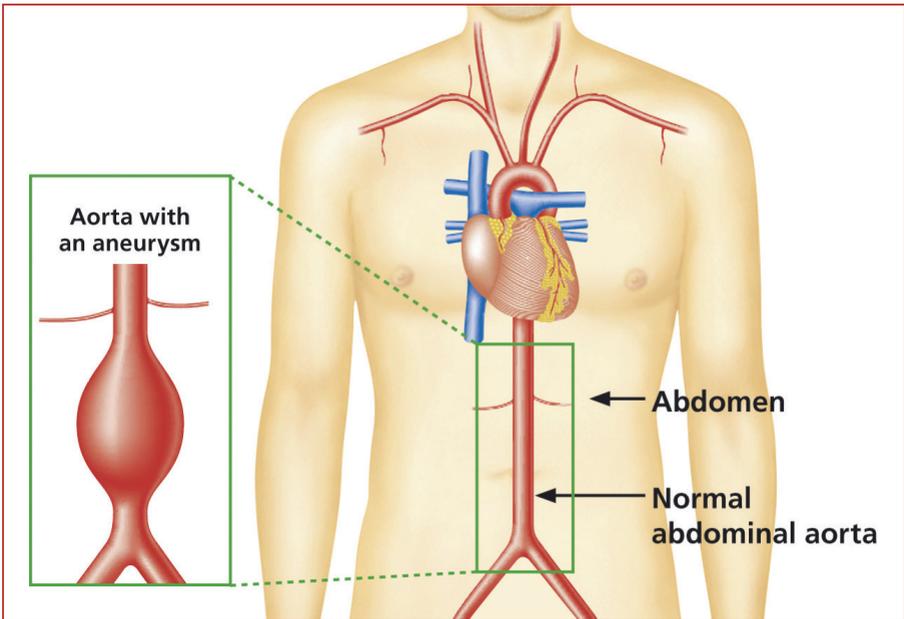


Diagram courtesy of the English NHS AAA Screening Programme

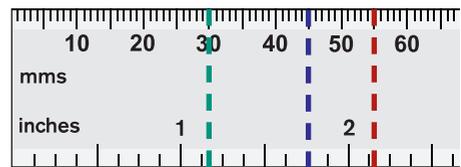
## What is an AAA?

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 known as a ruptured aneurysm.

<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 65 men aged 65 in Northern Ireland has 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 aneurysms 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 large AAA serious?

**A large AAA is serious** because the wall of the aorta can rupture (burst) as it stretches. A ruptured 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 9063 1828. 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 9063 1828.

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.

Anyone with a large AAA 60mm or more wide must inform the DVLA if they hold a car or motorcycle licence. Those with an AAA 65mm or more wide will be suspended from driving.

HGV drivers must inform the DVLA if they have an AAA of any size and will be suspended from driving if it reaches 55mm or more wide.

All licences are reinstated when the aneurysm has been successfully treated.



## 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 ruptures (bursts). A ruptured aneurysm leads to serious internal bleeding, which is fatal in 85% of 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. If this is the case, the hospital vascular team will continue to monitor the size of your aneurysm.

## 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. Find the support you need on the Want2stop Facebook page or by visiting [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info) where you can order a free Quit Kit. You can also text 'Quit' to 70004 for SMS text support.
- 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 you eat.
- If you are overweight, try to lose weight.
- If you drink alcohol, reduce the amount you consume.

### It is important that you are aware of any symptoms of a ruptured 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 about anything in this leaflet:

- call the AAA screening programme office on **028 9063 1828**;
- visit the website: **[www.aaascreening.info](http://www.aaascreening.info)**
- 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](http://www.circulationfoundation.org.uk)**



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