

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA)

This is a balloon-like bulge in a weak section of a major blood vessel — the aorta. It usually causes no symptoms. It is often diagnosed during tests for an unrelated problem. The presence of an AAA might mean that there are aneurysms in other vessels. These should be checked out by a specialist.

Risk factors include high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, family history of aneurysms, and advancing age. AAA runs in families.

Most treatment involves either “endovascular repair” or “open surgery.” Endovascular repair involves placing a graft in the aneurysm. The graft is inserted through an artery in the groin and is guided to the aorta. In open surgery, the doctor makes a large incision in the abdomen, and sews a graft above and below the aneurysm. This diverts the blood away from the affected area and prevents a potential rupture.

If anyone in your immediate family has AAA, you should see your doctor about checking for aneurysms. It could save your life.