

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA)

An aneurysm is a swelling or enlargement of a blood vessel. The aorta is the largest artery in your body. An abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) is an aneurysm affecting the part of the aorta located in the abdominal area. The aorta originates from the heart and travels down your body, just in front of your spine. As it travels down your body it gives off branches, or arteries, that supply blood to all your organs, including your stomach, intestines, liver and kidneys. It finally divides into the iliac arteries at about the level of the navel and supplies blood to the legs. Over 90% of aneurysms in the aorta occur in the section of the aorta in your abdomen just below the arteries branching to the kidneys.

Over 80% of aneurysms occur in males and take years to form. There are no symptoms associated with the development of an aneurysm. Therefore, patients may not be aware they have an aneurysm until it ruptures. When an aneurysm ruptures, it causes severe back and/or abdominal pain and can cause loss of consciousness. Seventy to ninety percent of patients with a ruptured aneurysm will not survive. Doctors may detect an aneurysm prior to rupture by physical examination or by ultrasound, X-ray, CT or MRI. The risk of rupture of an aneurysm is related to its size. The larger the aneurysm, the greater the risk of rupture. When the risk of rupture exceeds the risk of repair, your physician will recommend surgery.

Signs and Symptoms

Most people **do not** have symptoms, so most aortic aneurysms are found during examinations or tests performed for other reasons. Those that do have symptoms may experience the following:

- 1 A mass may be felt in the abdomen, or a pulsation may be seen when the person is lying down.
- 2 Pain may occur if the aneurysm presses on nerves or nearby organs.
- 3 Small blood clots, called emboli, may shower from the aneurysm, moving into the feet, causing the toes to turn blue and painful.
- 4 When an aneurysm bursts, there is sudden, severe pain in the abdomen and/or back. The person feels faint from low blood pressure and then rapidly goes into shock. Death will occur unless the blood pressure is maintained and the person receives surgical repair immediately.



Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening

An abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening uses ultrasound technology to measure the size of your abdominal aorta. The process is painless.

What Can I Learn From This Test?

The abdominal aorta should measure less than 3 centimeters. If it measures more than 3 centimeters, an aneurysm is suspected. There are 2 types of aneurysms, and our ultrasound equipment can screen for both. Abnormal screening results do not necessarily indicate the presence of an aneurysm, but they do warrant a visit to your physician for further evaluation.

How Is the Test Done?

You will be asked to lie on your back on an exam table. Our technologist will apply gel to your abdomen. Then, images and measurements of your aorta will be taken by moving an instrument called a transducer across your abdomen.

Who Should Have the Test?

Anyone who has risk factors for AAA should have this screening.

How Often Should I Get Screened?

This is a personal decision based on your risk factors and previous screening results.

How Do I Prepare for the Test?

- Wear a comfortable 2-piece outfit consisting of loose clothing.
- Fast for 4 hours prior to your screening.
- Make sure the meal you eat 4 hours prior to your screening is a light one (less than ½ of what you normally eat of non-gassy foods).
- If you are thirsty during your fasting period, you may have ½ cup of coffee or tea and a moderate amount of water.
- If you take medication, take it as prescribed.
- If you are diabetic and are not comfortable fasting for 4 hours, please limit yourself to a “diabetic meal” (piece of toast, 1 cup of any kind of juice and ½ cup of coffee or tea). If you are in doubt, please follow your diabetic care plan.

About Your Results

Your screening will be reviewed by one of our board certified physicians and discussed with you the same day of your screening. Your Primary Care Physician will receive a detailed report of your results in the mail.

To find a DeKalb Medical at Hillendale physician, call 404.501.WELL (9355) or visit dekalbmedical.org.



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