ABDOMINAL AORTIC ANEURYSM

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Introduction

An aneurysm is a bulge in a blood vessel caused by a weakness in the vessel's wall. Consequently, as blood passes through the weakened blood vessel, the blood pressure causes it to bulge outwards like a balloon.

Exactly what causes blood vessel walls to weaken is unclear, though hardening of the arteries, smoking, and high blood pressure are considered to increase the risk of an aneurysm.

The abdominal aorta

The abdominal aorta is the largest blood vessel in the body, and is roughly the width of a garden hose. It transports oxygenated blood away from the heart to the rest of the body.
It runs in a straight line down from the heart, through the chest and abdomen before branching off into a network of smaller blood vessels.

In most cases, an abdominal aortic aneurysm causes no noticeable symptoms and does not pose a serious threat to health.

However, there’s a risk that a larger aneurysm could burst open (rupture). A ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm can cause massive internal bleeding, which is usually fatal. Four out of five people with a ruptured aortic aneurysm will die as a result.

The most common symptom of a ruptured aortic aneurysm is sudden and severe pain in the abdomen.

**Who is affected?**

Abdominal aortic aneurysms are most common in men aged over 65, with around in 1 in 25 men being affected.

The number of aortic aneurysms that rupture is much smaller, with only around 1 in 10,000 people having a ruptured aortic aneurysm in any year in the UK.

**Prevention**

The best way to prevent getting an aneurysm, or to reduce the risk of an aneurysm growing larger and possibly rupturing, is to avoid activities that could damage blood vessels, such as:

- alcohol consumption
- diabetes
- high-fat diet
- not exercising regularly
- overweight or obese
- poor supplementation
- smoking
- stress

End

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