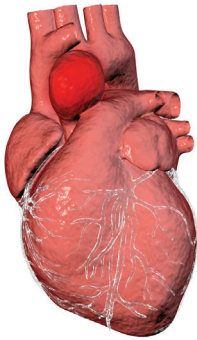


AORTIC ANEURYSMS

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The aorta is the main blood vessel that carries blood from the heart to all the arteries in the body. It travels down the back of the chest and abdomen and then branches into two large arteries by the hips. An aneurysm is a stretch or bulge in the vessel that is caused by long-term vessel wall damage. There are multiple ways to damage vessels including smoking, elevated blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol. An aortic aneurysm usually does not have symptoms, but it can tear and cause severe chest and back pain, significant internal bleeding and even death. Fortunately, there are ways to prevent this from happening. Stopping smoking, controlling your blood pressure and cholesterol will help reduce risks. Your physician may get a screening ultrasound to check on the blood vessels.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES INCLUDE:

- Quit smoking. The nicotine causes damage to the blood vessel walls, which makes it easier for the vessels to stretch and then tear.
- Control blood pressure with lifestyle changes and medication. High blood pressure creates a lot of stress on the vessels. This can lead to vessel wall damage and therefore stretching of the vessel wall.
- Control cholesterol and triglyceride levels with lifestyle modifications and medication. The buildup of fatty, cholesterol deposits on the inside of vessels narrow the area that blood can pass through and damages the vessel wall to which it is attached.
- Lifestyle changes can include exercise and a heart-healthy diet that is high in omega-three fatty acids. It is recommended that adults should have at least 30 minutes of cardio-intense workout three times per week like walking or running.
- USPSTF recommends all men have a screening ultrasound at the age of 65 to look for an aortic aneurysm. This is because white males are at a higher risk of developing an aneurysm, especially those that smoke. There has not been a definite recommendation for women, but if there is any history of aneurysms or any concerns, then you should speak to your doctor.

MEDICAL CARE & TREATMENT OPTIONS:

Once an aortic aneurysm is diagnosed, it requires close monitoring. Surgery may be required if the diameter of an aneurysm grows greater than 5.5cm. If you have a family history of aneurysms or are a male age 65 or greater, please call your Osteopathic Family Physician to discuss any necessary screenings. In case you develop any severe tearing chest pain that radiates to your back, you should call your doctor or 911 right away.

SOURCE(S): U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, Society for Vascular Surgery

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