



Patient & Family Guide
2016

Abdominal Aneurysm



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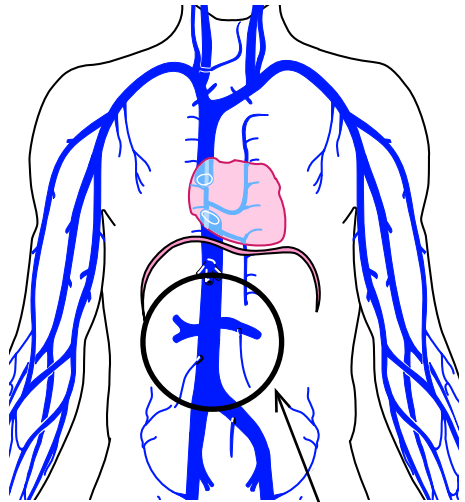
What is an abdominal aneurysm?

An aneurysm is a blood vessel in an artery that is bigger than normal. It is like a balloon; the bigger you blow the balloon, the thinner the walls get. It can happen in any blood vessel in the body, but it is more common in the groin, knee joint, and main artery of the abdomen (stomach area). When it is located in the main artery of the abdomen, it is called an abdominal aneurysm.

Why does it happen?

The causes of an aneurysm are not clearly known. They are related to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), high blood pressure, family history, or injury to the artery.

Aneurysms start small in size and grow bit by bit over time. Abdominal aneurysms usually grow about half a centimetre each year.



Healthy
abdominal aorta

Who is at risk of having an abdominal aneurysm?

An abdominal aneurysm is a disease of older people. It is rare before the age of 50-55 years in men and 55-60 years in women. People who have the following conditions are at a higher risk of having an aneurysm:

- › Hardening of the arteries
- › Aneurysms in other blood vessels
- › Family history of aneurysms
- › High blood pressure
- › Emphysema (a type of lung disease)
- › Smoking

A screening ultrasound should be done if you have risk factors and are over the age of 50. This is even more important if you have a family history of abdominal aneurysm. If you have an aneurysm, your brothers, sisters, and children over the age of 50 should have a screening ultrasound.

What can an abdominal aneurysm do to you?

Rupture - When the aneurysm reaches a certain size it can rupture (burst). This is a life-threatening situation. A larger aneurysm has a higher risk of rupturing than a smaller one.

How do doctors find out if a patient has an abdominal aneurysm?

Most people with abdominal aneurysms have no symptoms.

Doctors can feel the aneurysm by examination if a patient has a small abdomen. Ultrasounds and CT scans are the best tests to diagnose and measure the size of an aneurysm.

Sometimes there is a warning sign that the aneurysm is about to rupture. You may have severe pain in your abdomen and/or lower back or wherever the aneurysm is located. If this happens, you should go to the Emergency Department immediately.

What can be done about the aneurysm?

The only treatment is surgery. Your doctor will monitor the size of the aneurysm and decide when it is best to operate.

There are 2 ways to repair abdominal aneurysms:

1. Open repair is done through a large incision (cut) in your abdomen.
2. Endovascular repair is done through small incisions in your groin.

Your vascular surgeon will talk about your options for surgery with you.

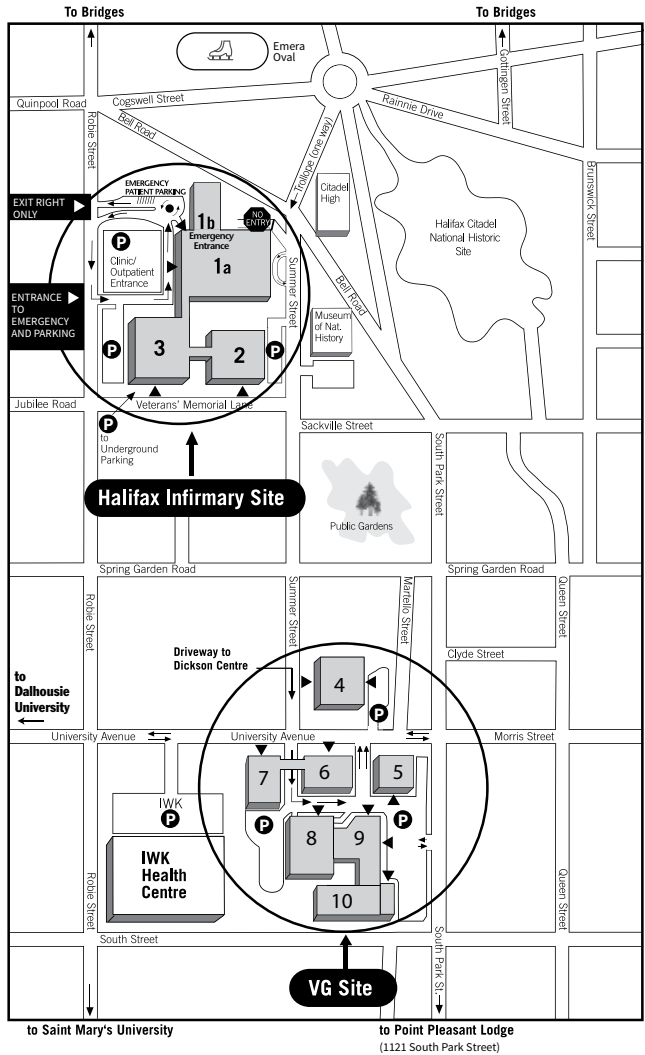
QEII Health Sciences Centre

is made up of 10 buildings located on two sites

- | Halifax Infirmary Site | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1a. | Halifax Infirmary |
| 1b. | Emergency Dept. |
| 2. | Abbie J. Lane Memorial Building |
| 3. | Camp Hill Veterans' Memorial Building |
| VG Site | |
| 4. | Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre |
| 5. | Bethune Building |
| 6. | Mackenzie Building Laboratories |
| 7. | Centre for Clinical Research |
| 8. | Dickson Building |
| 9. | Victoria Building |
| 10. | Centennial Building |

- P** Patient Parking
- ▶** Entrance Doors

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If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.