



Patient & Family Guide  
2022

# Abdominal Aneurysm

Aussi disponible en français : FF85-2079



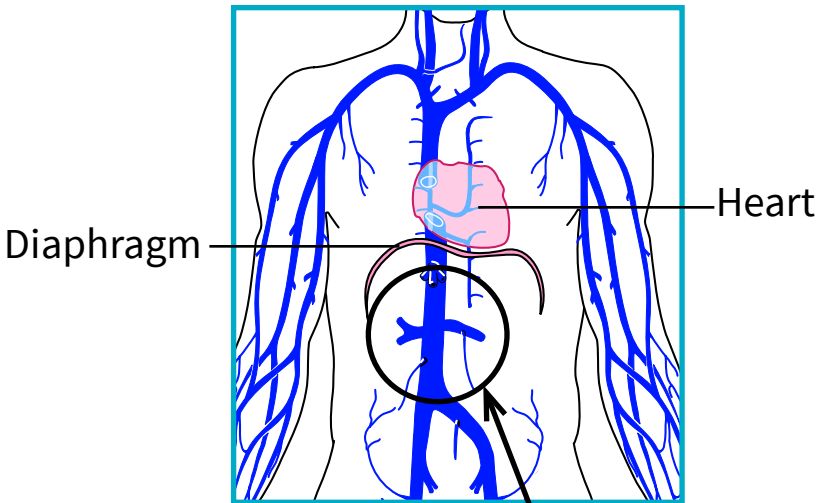
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# Abdominal Aneurysm

## What is an abdominal aneurysm?

An aneurysm happens when a blood vessel gets bigger than normal. The bigger the blood vessel gets, the thinner its walls get (like when you blow up a balloon).

An aneurysm can happen in any blood vessel in the body, but is more common in the groin, knee joint, and main artery of the abdomen (stomach area). When an aneurysm happens in the main artery of the abdomen, it is called an abdominal aneurysm.



Healthy abdominal aorta  
(the biggest artery in the body)

## **What causes an abdominal aneurysm?**

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

Aneurysms start small and grow bigger over time. Abdominal aneurysms usually grow about half a centimetre each year.

## **Who is at risk of having an abdominal aneurysm?**

- Abdominal aneurysms are more likely to happen in:
  - › males who are 50 to 55 years old or older.
  - › females who are 55 to 60 years old or older.
- You are at a higher risk of having an abdominal aneurysm if you:
  - › Have hardening of the arteries
  - › Have had an aneurysm in other blood vessel
  - › Have a family history of aneurysms
  - › Have high blood pressure
  - › Have emphysema (a type of lung disease)
  - › Smoke

- If you have any of these risk factors and you are over the age of 50, you should have a screening ultrasound. This is even more important if you have a family history of abdominal aneurysms.
- If you have an aneurysm:
  - › Your siblings and children should have a screening ultrasound if they are over the age of 50.

## **How is an abdominal aneurysm diagnosed?**

- Most people with an abdominal aneurysm have no symptoms.
- If you have a small abdomen, your doctor may be able to feel the aneurysm by doing a physical exam.
- You may need to have an ultrasound and/or a CT scan to diagnose and measure the size of the aneurysm.

## **What will happen if I have an abdominal aneurysm?**

An abdominal aneurysm may rupture (burst) when it gets to a certain size. **This is life-threatening.** The bigger an aneurysm is, the higher the chance it will rupture.

## **How is an abdominal aneurysm treated?**

**The only treatment is surgery.** You will see a vascular surgeon (a doctor who specializes in the surgery of arteries and veins). They will check the size of the aneurysm and decide when you should have surgery.

### **There are 2 ways to repair abdominal aneurysms:**

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

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

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

# QEII Health Sciences Centre

is made up of 10 buildings located on two sites

## Halifax Infirmary Site

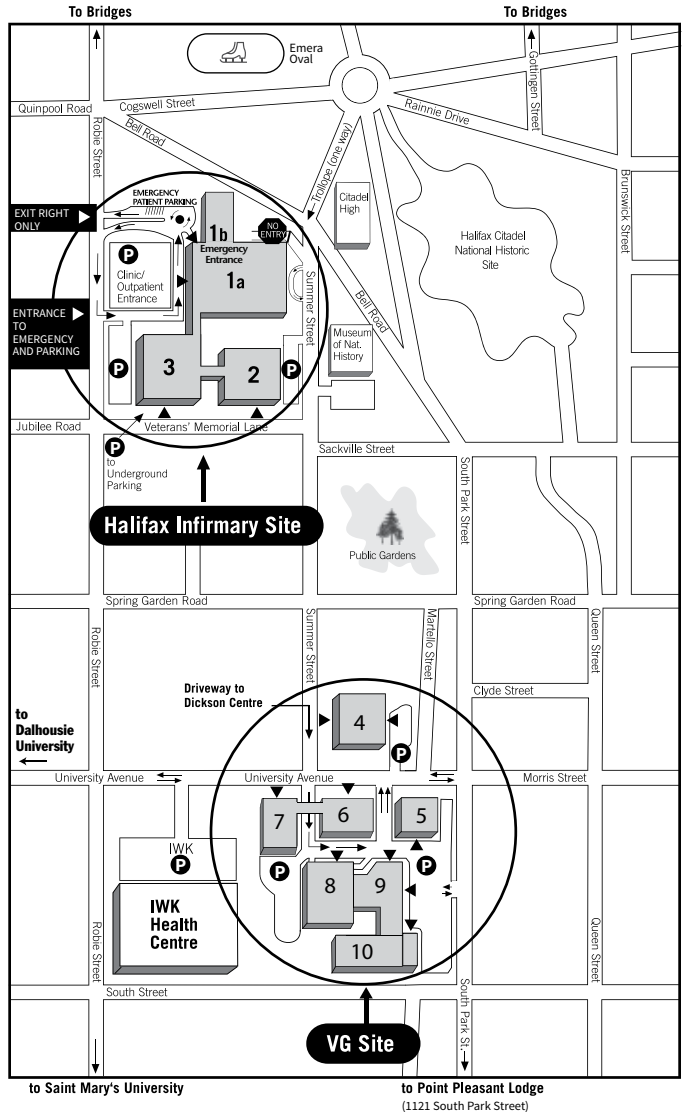
- 1a. Halifax Infirmary
- 1b. Emergency Dept.
2. Abbie J. Lane Memorial Building
3. Camp Hill Veterans' Memorial Building

## 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

*Please do not wear scented products when you come to the QEII.*



# Notes:

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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Prepared by: Vascular Surgery, QE II  
Illustration by: LifeART Super Anatomy 1 Images, Copyright © 1994,  
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