

### *Washington Hospital AAA Screening Could Save Your Life*

A painless, noninvasive screening procedure could save your life. About 15 minutes is all it takes to find out whether you have an abdominal aortic aneurysm known as AAA. If you have high blood pressure and are over age 60, you are at greater risk for developing an AAA.

The abdominal aorta is the largest blood vessel in the body and the main artery that begins in the heart. As the lining weakens from age and other risk factors, the vessel wall thins and expands, creating a bulge. The most common location for an AAA is between where the aorta divides to supply blood to the kidneys and where it divides to supply blood to the pelvis and legs. The aorta is the body's main supplier of blood, so a ruptured AAA can cause life-threatening internal bleeding.

“If you are over age 60 and have multiple risk factors, you should get the AAA screening,” said Dr. Ash Jain, a cardiologist and medical co-director of Washington Hospital’s Vascular Services Program. “The test is safe, effective, and painless.”

The AAA screening is conducted with an ultrasound of the abdomen, which uses sound waves that create a picture of the internal organs, Dr. Jain explained. The noninvasive test uses a clear, water-based conducting gel that is applied to the skin over the abdomen. This helps with the transmission of the sound waves. A handheld probe called a transducer is then moved over the abdomen. The procedure takes about 15 minutes.

Dr. Jain will conduct free AAA screenings with Dr. John Thomas Mehigan, a vascular surgeon and medical co-director of Washington Hospital’s Vascular Services Program, on Saturday, January 25, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The screening will be held at the Conrad E. Anderson, MD Auditorium located at 2500 Mowry Avenue

(Washington West) in Fremont. You must sign up for the screening in advance. No walk-ins will be accepted. To

register for the screening, call (800) 963-7070.

#### Who Should Get the Test?

While anyone can get this type of aneurysm, it is more common in men over the age of 60. Other risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, smoking, obesity, and a positive family history. Symptoms of an AAA include a tingling or pulsating sensation near the bellybutton, pain in the abdomen or back, nausea, and dizziness. These symptoms often appear suddenly and without warning.

“Don’t wait until you are experiencing symptoms,” Dr. Mehigan said. “By the time symptoms occur, it could be too late to prevent the aneurysm from rupturing.”

Each year, physicians diagnose approximately 200,000 people in the United States with AAA, according to the Society of Vascular Surgery. Of those 200,000, nearly 15,000 are at risk of death from its rupture if not treated. “Often these types of aneurysms go undetected,” Dr. Mehigan added. “A majority of these aneurysms are found by accident or through AAA screening, mostly due to the hard-to-reach position of the artery that supplies blood to the abdomen. That makes the aneurysm very difficult to feel in a routine examination.”

Abdominal aortic aneurysms usually start small, another reason they can go undetected for years, Dr. Mehigan added. Some of these aneurysms grow very slowly and never become a problem, while others can grow quickly and rupture before any symptoms occur.

#### Early Detection Improves Treatment Options

“With early detection, we can catch the aneurysm when it is small,” Dr. Jain explained. “The ultrasound technology detects and accurately measures the size of the aneurysm to determine if treatment is needed.”

He said aneurysms smaller than five centimeters can be treated effectively with medications. Those measuring three to four centimeters should be monitored with an ultrasound test every year. Aneurysms larger than five centimeters

should be treated aggressively using stents, Dr. Jain added. The stent reinforces the weakened wall of the aorta. It reduces the pressure on the aneurysm and provides a new pathway for the blood to flow.

“Treatment options have gotten much better over the years, particularly if we catch the aneurysm when it is small,” Dr. Jain said. “Technology has improved so much that even if a stent is required, the patient can usually go home the day after the procedure.”

Anyone who is at high risk for an AAA should consider getting the free screening. After the ultrasound test, patients have the opportunity to speak with a physician who can answer their questions. <Begin Box>

#### Saving Lives with Free Screenings

To register for this free upcoming screening, call the Washington Hospital Health Connection line at (800)

963-7070. To find out about other free health screenings at Washington Hospital that can help to keep you and your

family healthy, visit [www.whhs.com/screenings](http://www.whhs.com/screenings).

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AAA Screening ? TCV January 7, 2014 ? Caitlin Kerk ? 408.972.5781 ?