

Facts about aneurysms

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An aneurysm forms when the wall of an artery becomes weak and stretches from the pressure of the blood flowing through it.

Once an aneurysm develops, it tends to stretch and grow more over time. At some point the artery can burst. Of all the aneurysms one might have, the least desirable would be aortic (the largest artery in the body) or intracranial (within the brain). If an aneurysm of the aorta bursts, enormous amounts of blood are lost very quickly.

Rupture of an artery in the brain results in bleeding or a stroke which is, more often than not, very damaging.

Aneurysms have more than one cause. Brain aneurysms tend to be congenital, that is one is born with the tendency for these to form. Abdominal aortic aneurysms are more likely to be caused by what we do. High blood pressure and smoking are two big risk factors for aortic aneurysms.

Aneurysms are tricky because they are often silent until they leak or burst. An aortic aneurysm may cause throbbing abdominal pain which radiates to the groin, testicles, or back, but often the first sign is the hollow coconut sound. The most common symptom in a brain aneurysm is a severe headache of sudden onset.

This may be the only warning sign. If you are lucky, as in fall off a cliff lucky or struck by a moving train lucky, you will experience a severe headache. This is a headache that is caused by a very small bleed that results in pain, but no damage. These often portend a larger bleed. A person, who experiences an unusual headache, especially if it is severe, should have it evaluated immediately.

The screening test for abdominal aneurysms is quite easy; ultrasound of the abdomen. This is a non invasive test, which means no knives, needles, or cork screws, no blood is let, and there are no tubes inserted anywhere, unless we happen to have an extra tube just sitting around looking lonely.

We start by squirting some ultrasound gel onto the abdomen. This harmless gel is made from virgin, organic, crude oil, dispensed from a hand-crafted, organic, number 5 plastic bottle. A transducer, which is placed gently upon the gel, emits friendly, little sound waves that travel through your abdomen, like dolphins through the ocean, to bounce off of the aorta and create an image.

Perhaps a dolphin isn't the best metaphor because a real dolphin, especially an evil dolphin, would tear an enormous hole in your aorta and you would bleed to death right there on the table. Anyway measurements of the aortic diameter are made to determine whether an aneurysm is present. If there is an aneurysm and it is relatively small, we would repeat the ultrasound about one year later to track its growth. If it is large, that is when we get out the cork screw. No, actually at that point you would be referred to a surgeon to discuss whether it should be repaired. There is no recommended screening test for brain aneurysms, but screening for aortic aneurysm is recommended if you are or have been a smoker and have high blood pressure. If this is you, we can do the screening at Lopez Clinic and yes we have organic ultrasound gel and the cork screw.