**Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening**

An abdominal ultrasound is a painless screening that can detect AAA, which is vital, since most patients don’t show symptoms. This test identifies enlarged abdominal aorta, which may suggest the presence of an aneurysm. A ruptured AAA can cause blood loss, shock and possible death.

**What is an Aortic Aneurysm?**

Your heart is the most important muscle in your body. During your lifetime it will pump enough blood to fill about three supertankers. The aorta is the largest blood vessel in the body. Although your aorta is a tough, durable workhorse, sometimes its walls can weaken and bulge in what is called an aortic aneurysm. This could cause a leak that spills blood into your body. Some aortic aneurysms burst, some don’t. Others force blood flow away from your organs and tissues, causing problems, such as heart attacks, kidney damage, stroke, and even death.

**Aortic Aneurysms**

There are two locations of aortic aneurysms. One, in the chest, is a thoracic aortic aneurysm (detected by an echocardiogram - which is already part of your preventive screening program). The other is in the abdomen and is called an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA). This is in the portion of your aorta that passes through your abdomen. There are usually no telltale signs to warn you that something is wrong. However, you still might have:

- Back pain
- A deep pain on the side of your abdomen
- A throbbing sensation near your navel

If the aneurysm ruptures, you might feel sick to your stomach, or suddenly develop an intense pain in your back or abdomen. You might vomit, become sweaty, or feel dizzy.

Doctors don’t really know what causes an abdominal aortic aneurysm, although they suspect a few things might play a role:

- Hardening of the arteries, which doctors also call atherosclerosis
- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- Genetic predisposition

Doctors also think the risks increase if you injure yourself, have an infection, or if your blood vessels become inflamed. Genetics also play a role.

If you have or develop an abdominal aneurysm, there can be a chance of blood clots. Small clots can form in the area of the aneurysm, break off, and flow to the legs, kidneys, or other organs. The AAA can be detected with an ultrasound of the Abdominal Aorta. Early detection of an AAA allows those at risk to be followed to prevent a rupture and clots.