



# Screening tests for brain aneurysms

When you need them—and when you don't

brain aneurysm is a weak area in the wall of a blood vessel in the brain. It can burst and cause a stroke, and can even lead to death.

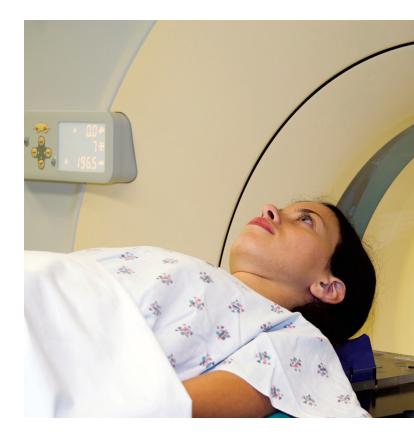
Doctors use imaging tests—like CT scans or MRIs to screen for brain aneurysms. That may sound like a good idea. But the tests and follow-up can do more harm than good. Here's why:

## Screening tests can lead to unneeded follow-up and treatment.

Brain aneurysms are rare. So when doctors order imaging tests, they usually don't find any aneurysms. That means patients are exposed to risks without any benefit.

Sometimes, a CT scan or MRI will show something on the image that is unclear. This can lead to more tests, which may add to your risks.

A CT scan or MRI might also find small "incidental aneurysms" that may never be a problem.



### Imaging tests cost a lot and have risks.

Depending on your insurance, a CT scan or MRI of the head can cost from \$650 to \$1,000. Follow-up testing or treatment can add a lot to the costs.

Also, CT scans expose you to radiation.

## When do you need screening tests for brain aneurysms?

Screening tests can be a good idea if:

- You had a brain aneurysm in the past.
- You had a type of stroke called a subarachnoid hemorrhage. It's caused when an aneurysm bursts and there's bleeding between the brain and the tissue around it.
- You have two or more close relatives who have had aneurysms.
- You have other risks for aneurysms, such as these genetic conditions: Marfan Syndrome, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome IV, or Polycystic kidney disease.

## You may need to be evaluated if you have symptoms of a burst aneurysm.

The main symptom is an unusual, sudden, severe headache. Often patients say it's "the worst headache of my life." Other symptoms may include:

- A stiff neck
- Pain in the face
- Seeing double
- Light sensitivity
- Vision loss
- Odd eye movements
- A seizure or change in speech or alertness

This report is for you to use when talking with your health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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## Advice from Consumer Reports

# Tips for preventing stroke

Brain aneurysms are one of many causes of strokes. The tips below may help you reduce your risk of stroke.

### Make healthy lifestyle choices.

- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Don't eat processed foods.
- Eat less than one teaspoon of table salt (2,300 mg sodium) per day.
- If you drink alcohol, have no more than two drinks a day if you're a man, or no more than one drink a day if you're a woman.
- Get 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week.
- Keep a healthy weight. Ask your doctor what's right for you and how to keep it.
- If you use tobacco, quit—or don't start.

### Have your blood levels and pulse checked.

- Watch your blood pressure. If it's above normal, try the lifestyle changes above. If it's high, your doctor may prescribe medication.
- Keep your cholesterol level in a healthy range. If it's too high, try lifestyle changes.
- Keep diabetes under control. Manage blood sugar levels and keep blood pressure and cholesterol at healthy levels.
- Getting your pulse and blood pressure checked at every doctor's appointment can help show irregular heart rhythms.

