

Endovascular Treatment of Dissections

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It's not uncommon for someone to experience chest or back pain that requires evaluation in an emergency room. While these symptoms can often be the result of cardiac problems, it may also be from a separation of the layers in your major artery: the aorta, and is referred to as an aortic dissection.

Aortic dissections and diseases of the aorta result in approximately 45,000 deaths per year and are more common than breast cancer and prostate cancer. It afflicts people from all walks of life including several famous people: John Ritter, Lucile Ball and Conway Twitty; none of which survived. Typically the separation of the layers of the arterial wall is the result of a tear in the artery from elevated blood pressure otherwise known as hypertension. Most people are familiar with the term hypertension and may even have family members or know someone with hypertension but are unaware of the potential problems that can occur if it goes untreated or is not under appropriate control. Potential problems include damage to your heart, kidney failure, stroke and the development of an aortic dissection. Risks factors that may predispose patients to developing an aortic dissection include smoking, uncontrolled hypertension, and a family history of the disease.

When an aortic dissection occurs most people describe a tearing back pain located between their shoulder blades. When this occurs one should seek immediate medical attention. Depending on the location of the dissection many patients can be managed with aggressive blood pressure control. If complications ensue, repair of the artery and correction of the complication is typically required. As medical techniques improve, many of these interventions can be undertaken in a minimally invasive or endovascular fashion.

Currently, at centers of excellence, clinical trials are being conducted to determine the effectiveness of these newer techniques compared to traditional surgical repair. The studies are being conducted by vascular surgeons who are the medical specialists involved in managing and treating all disorders of arteries and veins.

To learn more about your vascular health and find a vascular surgeon visit VascularWeb.org.