

95% of aneurysms result in death

Sometimes Even Docs Not Aware Of This Life-Threatening Condition

Shobha John | TNN

New Delhi: Looking at 86-year-old Lajwanti's frail and deeply-lined face with a pig-tail makes you want to protect her. She gives a weak smile even though she seems lost in the big city hospital where she's been admitted after a near-death experience.

On October 24, as she was having lunch, she got a shooting pain in her abdomen and fell unconscious. She was rushed to hospital with no pulse or BP.

A CT scan revealed that her abdominal aorta had ruptured due to an aneurysm (swelling). And increasingly, many patients are coming to doctors with this affliction.

"Awareness has increased. But sometimes we find even doctors aren't aware of this life-threatening condition. Death is sudden and certain in 95% of rupture cases," says Anil Bhan, director, cardiothoracic vascular surgery, Max Heart Institute. Much depends on the size of the aneurysm. If it's over 5 cms wide, chances of rupture are higher.

An aneurysm, incidentally, is a weakened area of a blood vessel that balloons to over 50% the normal size and ruptures. The mean interval from its growth to

FATAL RUPTURE

What's an ANEURYSM?
Weakened area of blood vessel that balloons out and can rupture

Symptoms Of Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

- A pulsating feeling like a heartbeat in the adomen
- Severe, sudden pain in the abdomen or lower back. This indicates that it is about to burst
- Pain, discolouration or sore feet
- If aneurysm bursts, intense weakness, dizziness or unconsciousness. Seek medical help immediately



Lajwanti, her aneurysm burst recently, causing threat to her life.

1 AORTIC ANEURYSM



2 Opened aorta



3 Graft



Repair in progress

CAUSES

- Connective tissue disorders
- Trauma (accidents) & infections
- Atherosclerosis—fatty deposits in artery walls. This weakens them, making them less elastic
- Gender: Men more likely to develop it
- Age: Common in older people, especially 60-69 years
- Family history

TREATMENT

Stents & surgery | Surgery advised in aneurysms over 5 cm as risk of rupture is higher

rupture is about two years and without medical inter-

vention, chances of survival after five years are 20%, says

Bhan. According to a Swedish study, it strikes 489 men and 437 women in per lakh population. "India would also be reaching these figures soon as its life expectancy increases," says Bhan.

Bhan, who has operated upon 561 aneurysms in the last five years, says, "The size of aneurysms vary according to location. The largest I operated on was 18 cm in the abdominal aorta. Brain aneurysms would be much smaller. It can strike at any age, though older people are more prone to it. My oldest patient was 94 years and the youngest, one-and-a-half years."

Lajwanti underwent an emergency operation, where a part of her abdominal aorta was replaced with synthetic tube graft made of collagen-impregnated polyester.

Her family still can't fathom how this crisis took place. "My mother, despite being 85, is quite fit," says Vinod Bhargava, one of her sons. "She has no health problems, still goes to the market, cooks for us and is generally immune to pain. So it was

a shock to see her in this state." Lajwanti smiles through pain-filled eyes and says, "I am ok now."

Sometimes, even doctors are ignorant of this problem. Take 61-year-old Balwant Arora, a physician, from Ludhiana. A week back, while out on a brisk walk, he suddenly felt a vice-like grip on his backside. He collapsed and had to drag himself home. "I thought it was a neurological problem. When an MRI was done, the aneurysm was noticed. I was asked to come to Delhi for further surgery." Fortunately, only a clot had developed in his aneurysm; it hadn't ruptured. But he got it removed to be on the safe side.

Aneurysms can occur in any part — brain, abdomen, legs....Those in the chest are called thoracic aortic aneurysms. Doctors can often make out if an aneurysm has ruptured. Abdominal aortic aneurysms are felt as a pulsating mass in the abdomen.

A ruptured brain aneurysm will show up as bleeding in the brain and the patient will be comatose; others lead to swelling in the face. However, aneurysms are found on routine physical examination and X-rays.

This is one 'balloon' you simply can't ignore.

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