

# Aortic Dissection: Recognizing the Signs and Seeking Immediate Care

Valadez Nikolay\*

Department of Endovascular Surgery, Turku University Hospital, 20100 Turku, Finland

## Introduction

Aortic dissection is a severe medical emergency that occurs when there is a tear in the inner layer of the aorta, the large blood vessel branching off the heart. This condition requires urgent medical attention as it can lead to life-threatening complications if left untreated. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of aortic dissection is crucial for seeking immediate care and improving outcomes. The aorta is the main artery that carries oxygen-rich blood from the heart to the rest of the body. Aortic dissection occurs when there is a tear in the inner lining of the aorta, allowing blood to flow between the layers of the vessel wall. This can cause the layers to separate, creating a false channel for blood flow. If not promptly treated, the dissection can extend along the length of the aorta, leading to rupture or decreased blood flow to vital organs [1].

Aortic dissection often presents with sudden, severe chest or upper back pain that may radiate to the neck, jaw, or arms. The pain is often described as tearing or ripping and may be accompanied by other symptoms such as shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, or fainting. However, it's important to note that the presentation of aortic dissection can vary widely from person to person, and some individuals may not experience typical symptoms. Certain factors may increase the risk of aortic dissection, including high blood pressure, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), connective tissue disorders, such as Marfan syndrome or Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a history of heart surgery, and a family history of aortic dissection or other cardiovascular conditions. People with these risk factors should be particularly vigilant about any unusual symptoms and seek medical attention promptly if they occur. Given the potential severity of aortic dissection, prompt medical evaluation is crucial. If you or someone you know experiences sudden, severe chest or upper back pain, especially if accompanied by other concerning symptoms, it is essential to seek emergency medical care immediately. Do not ignore the symptoms or delay seeking help, as timely intervention can significantly improve outcomes [2].

In the emergency department, healthcare providers will conduct a thorough evaluation, which may include a physical examination, electrocardiogram, chest X-ray, echocardiogram, and computed tomography scan or magnetic resonance imaging to confirm the diagnosis of aortic dissection. Treatment typically involves stabilizing the patient's condition, controlling blood pressure, and often surgical intervention to repair the torn aorta. Aortic dissection is a serious medical condition that requires prompt recognition and immediate medical attention. Knowing the signs and symptoms of aortic dissection and understanding the importance of seeking emergency care can be lifesaving. If you or someone you know experiences sudden, severe chest or upper back pain, do not hesitate to call emergency services or go to the nearest

\*Address for Correspondence: Valadez Nikolay, Department of Endovascular Surgery, Turku University Hospital, 20100 Turku, Finland; E-mail: [nikolayvdz@gmail.com](mailto:nikolayvdz@gmail.com)

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emergency room. Early intervention can make a significant difference in the outcome and recovery from this potentially life-threatening condition [3].

## Description

Beyond the general risk factors mentioned earlier, certain activities or conditions can increase the likelihood of aortic dissection. These include heavy lifting or strenuous physical activity, cocaine or amphetamine use, pregnancy, and certain medical procedures, such as catheterization or surgery involving the aorta. Individuals with these risk factors should be especially vigilant about any unusual symptoms and discuss their risk with a healthcare provider. Aortic dissection can lead to several serious complications, including aortic rupture, which is often fatal if not treated immediately. Other complications may include organ damage due to decreased blood flow, such as stroke, heart attack, kidney failure, or damage to the intestines or limbs. Prompt diagnosis and treatment are essential for preventing these complications and improving outcomes [4].

Treatment for aortic dissection typically involves a combination of medications to control blood pressure and surgical intervention to repair the torn aorta. The specific approach depends on the location and extent of the dissection, as well as the individual's overall health and preferences. After treatment, close monitoring and follow-up care are essential to assess the effectiveness of treatment, manage any ongoing symptoms or complications, and prevent recurrence. In some cases, aortic dissection may have a genetic component, particularly in individuals with hereditary connective tissue disorders like Marfan syndrome or Ehlers-Danlos syndrome [5]. Genetic testing and counseling may be recommended for individuals with a family history of aortic dissection or related conditions to assess their risk and develop appropriate screening and management strategies. Making lifestyle changes to manage underlying risk factors can help reduce the risk of aortic dissection and other cardiovascular conditions. This includes maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet low in sodium and saturated fats, exercising regularly, avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol consumption, managing stress, and monitoring blood pressure and cholesterol levels regularly.

## Conclusion

Aortic dissection is a medical emergency that requires prompt recognition, evaluation, and treatment to prevent life-threatening complications. By understanding the signs and symptoms of aortic dissection, knowing the risk factors, and seeking immediate medical care when necessary, individuals can improve their chances of a favorable outcome. Healthcare providers play a critical role in diagnosing and managing aortic dissection, and ongoing research is needed to further improve diagnostic techniques, treatment options, and outcomes for this condition.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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