

Tear in the aorta

"Aortic dissection" is the medical term for a bleeding into and along the wall of the aorta, the main artery that supplies blood to the rest of the body. It occurs in about two in every 10,000 people, mostly aged between 40 and 70.

It is a life-threatening condition, mostly caused by a tear in the aorta's inner wall. It usually occurs in the upper part of the body near the chest, but may also occur in the abdominal area.

High blood pressure, hyperlipidaemia and diabetes are some of the risk factors. Other risk factors include atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and traumatic injury.

Symptoms include sudden and severe chest pain, decrease in consciousness, disorientation, slowing of body movement, weakening of sensation in the limbs, pallor, rapid but weak pulse beat, excessive sweating, nausea and vomiting, dizziness, and shortness of breath.

The disease may be revealed in an x-ray, echocardiogram, CT scan, chest MRI or aortic angiography.

Surgery or medication is recommended according to the type of disease and the patient should be admitted to a hospital.

Proper treatment and control of hypertension, hyperlipidaemia and diabetes mellitus may reduce the risk of contracting the disease, and smoking should be prohibited.