

Facing Your Aortic Future



www.johnritterfoundation.org/ritter-rules/

Receiving a diagnosis of thoracic aortic disease can feel overwhelming, but there is hope! The Ritter Rules provide clear, actionable steps for people affected by thoracic aortic aneurysms and dissections to take charge of their health. These rules are designed to educate and empower you to advocate for your best care. With the right care, this condition can be managed, and you can live a full life.

BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

Advocate for Yourself

Being your own advocate can help ensure you are receiving the best possible treatment. This involves learning about thoracic aortic aneurysms or dissections, keeping up with your doctor appointments throughout your life, seeking second opinions, and working together with your healthcare team to make the best treatment choices. Advocating for yourself and asking questions can sometimes be uncomfortable but is worth it when it comes to your life and health.

GENETICS & FAMILY

Seek Genetic Testing & Counseling

Thoracic aortic aneurysms and dissections can have a genetic basis. Evaluation by a geneticist or genetic counselor can help determine if you have a genetic predisposition. This can personalize your care plan and help identify other at-risk family members.

Alert Family

Up to 1 in 5 people with a thoracic aortic aneurysm or dissection have at least one family member with the same condition. In many cases, affected family members will only be found by imaging to detect asymptomatic aneurysms. First-degree relatives should be screened by imaging the thoracic aorta using an echocardiogram, computed tomography angiogram (CTA), or a magnetic resonance angiogram (MRA).

ACCESS CARE

Build a Care Team

Your team should include a cardiologist to manage your aorta and blood pressure, and a primary care provider to look after your overall health. Your cardiologists should be familiar with the current guidelines for diagnosis and management of aortic disease. You may need other healthcare providers on your team, including experts in genetics, cardiovascular surgery, mental health, and physical therapy.

Consider an Aortic Center

Multidisciplinary aortic centers bring together a team of medical providers with different specialties and expertise in aortic conditions. Seeing doctors who regularly work with aortic patients improves outcomes. This is especially important for anyone undergoing cardiovascular surgery. However, you may find that a local provider or hospital better suits your needs. Many major aortic centers offer care by video or phone, which can supplement local care.

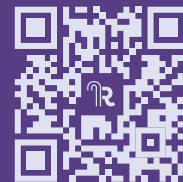
SUPPORT

Prioritize Mental Health

You and your family members may experience a wide range of emotional reactions to your condition. It is common to experience isolation, anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder during your journey. A strong support system of caregivers, family, friends, and healthcare professionals is essential for maintaining your mental health and well-being.

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LIFELONG CARE & FOLLOW UP

Don't Skip a Scan

Aortic aneurysms and dissections require lifelong management, including regular aortic imaging. The schedule and type of imaging depend on the aortic condition you have, your family history, and your genetic diagnosis.

Maintain Your Medications

Most people with a thoracic aortic aneurysm or dissection need to take at least one medication to control blood pressure and heart rate. These medications are essential for reducing the risk of aortic dissection. Make sure you never run out of your medications and always have refills ready.

Stay Active

Having an aortic aneurysm or dissection doesn't mean you can't exercise and be active. In fact, it's important to do so! However, depending on your individual diagnosis and health status, some types of exercise or activities should be avoided. Talk with your medical providers about the best exercise plan for you. Together, you can build a routine that will keep you healthy and active throughout your lifetime.

Act Fast in Emergencies

Severe pain is the #1 symptom of an acute aortic dissection, which is a medical emergency. If you have sudden, severe pain, particularly in your chest or back, get medical help right away. Remember that a computed tomography (CT) scan or echocardiogram is the fastest and most accurate way to diagnose a thoracic aortic dissection. A chest X-ray, EKG, or blood test cannot rule out dissection. Always let emergency medical providers know you have a thoracic aortic aneurysm or dissection.

CHECKLIST & NOTES

My cardiologist or primary aortic specialist's name and contact information:

My preferred hospital if I have an aortic emergency: (Name and location)

My aortic and vascular diagnoses include:
(ex: thoracic aortic aneurysm, dissection, Marfan syndrome)

My past aortic or vascular surgical procedures include:
(ex: aortic root replacement – 2022)

My usual frequency of aortic imaging is:
(e.g., every 6 months, once a year)

My blood pressure goal is:
(ex: less than 120/80 mmHg)

My first-degree relatives have been informed of their potential increased risk for aortic disease:
(ex: parents, siblings, children)
