

NEW MINIMALLY INVASIVE PROCEDURE:

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## Endovascular Stent Grafts—A Safeguard For Patients

It's estimated that 15,000 Americans over age 55 die each year of ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms. The aorta is one of the body's main arteries, and a weakening in the part located in the abdomen can produce a "balloon" or bulge. Someone who suffers a rupture in this weak spot may bleed to death.

Though Dallas Frankhouser has such an aneurysm, he has been doubly fortunate. His first bit of good luck came when the aortic weakness was identified during a CT scan scheduled for an unrelated medical condition – a hernia. And the second piece of good fortune arrived in the form of a new, minimally invasive procedure at Lewistown Hospital, the endovascular stent graft, which the Reedsville retiree received Sept. 19.

Following diagnostic tests, the endovascular stent graft procedure was performed by Dr. Philip L. Rice – a vascular surgeon and the only physician in a three-county area now performing the procedure. The three-to-four hour process begins with anesthesia; then a small incision is made in the upper thigh. Using a form of X-ray for guidance, a delivery catheter (a long tube-like device that assists in the placement of the stent graft within the blood vessel) is passed through the large blood vessel in the thigh – the iliac vessel.

When the catheter reaches the site of the aneurysm, the stent graft is slowly released into the blood vessel. In contact with blood, the stent graft expands to a preset size. Once the stent graft expands, the catheter is withdrawn. When the procedure is complete, the stent graft excludes the aneurysm and protects against rupture. (In some cases, it's necessary to place additional stent grafts to be sure the aneurysm is completely excluded.)

Thanks to the minimally invasive nature of the procedure, Frankhouser spent only two days in the hospital and was already well on his way to returning to his normal routine when the stitches were removed in early October. Frankhouser now carries a card notifying medical personnel that he's had the procedure, and he'll undergo CT scans periodically. He's feeling fine, and his new stent graft can greatly reduce the chances of an aortic rupture. ■

An endovascular stent graft, a woven polyester tube covered by a metal web, is placed in the artery to protect the weakened vessel from rupturing.

