

Arteriovenous Malformations

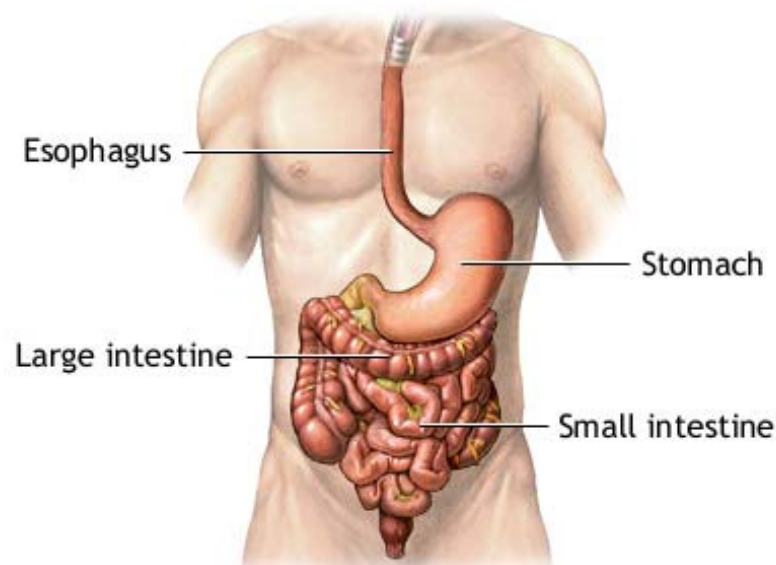
Arteriovenous malformations (AVMs) are dilated, misshapen blood vessels located just underneath the inner lining of the stomach or the small or large intestines. In many people, they are thought to be present from birth and may be hereditary in such cases. In other people, they tend to appear with age, especially in the large intestines of patients with kidney failure.

No one is sure what causes AVMs. Often they are discovered incidentally when a person undergoes an upper or lower endoscopy for other reasons. In such instances, no treatment is necessary.

In other cases, AVMs cause gastrointestinal (digestive tract) bleeding. The bleeding can be slow and lead to a gradual anemia over weeks to months, or can occur rapidly and cause intermittent, massive blood loss. They often elude diagnosis because they can occur in the small intestine, a region that is difficult to examine during endoscopy.

When AVMs are detectable and thought to be the cause of gastrointestinal bleeding, they are treated with direct heat cautery, a procedure in which the malformed blood vessels are burned and destroyed. They can also be treated with clips that prevent them from bleeding.

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