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Game of Thrones Star Emilia Clarke Nearly Died Twice From Brain Aneurysms During Her Years on the Show—Doctors Warn About the Warning Signs Everyone Should Know

By bestfolkmedicine · 07/11/2026 · 11 min read



Millions watched her command dragons and conquer kingdoms on Game of Thrones. But behind the scenes, Emilia Clarke was fighting a life-threatening medical battle that almost ended her career—and her life.

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To millions of television viewers, Emilia Clarke will always be Daenerys Targaryen, the powerful Mother of Dragons from HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

On screen, she appeared fearless, commanding armies and surviving impossible challenges.

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But what audiences didn't know was that the young actress had been through something far more frightening than anything written into the show's script.

Before turning 30, Clarke had survived two life-threatening brain hemorrhages associated with cerebral aneurysms.

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She underwent multiple brain procedures, temporarily lost her ability to communicate properly, and feared that she might never act again.

For years, she kept her medical struggles largely private.

When she finally revealed her story in 2019, the details shocked fans around the world.

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And the first warning sign was something many people might initially mistake for an ordinary headache.

It Started With a Headache Unlike Anything She Had Experienced

In February 2011, Emilia Clarke was just 24 years old.

She had recently finished filming the first season of *Game of Thrones*, a series that would soon transform her into an international celebrity.

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While exercising with a personal trainer, she suddenly experienced an overwhelming pain in her head.

It wasn't the familiar discomfort of tension or an ordinary headache.

The pain was intense, sudden, and debilitating.

She attempted to continue exercising but quickly realized something was seriously wrong.

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Soon afterward, she became violently ill.

The young actress had suffered a subarachnoid hemorrhage, a dangerous form of bleeding in the space surrounding the brain.

The cause was a ruptured cerebral aneurysm.

She was rushed to a hospital, where doctors performed an urgent procedure to stop the bleeding.

She survived, but her recovery was far from straightforward.

What Is a Brain Aneurysm?

A cerebral aneurysm develops when a weakened section of a blood vessel in the brain bulges outward.

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Some aneurysms remain small and never cause symptoms.

Others may enlarge or eventually rupture.

When an aneurysm ruptures, blood can spill into the space surrounding the brain, causing a subarachnoid hemorrhage.

This is a medical emergency because bleeding can rapidly increase pressure, injure brain tissue, and disrupt normal circulation.

A ruptured aneurysm can lead to stroke, seizures, permanent neurological damage, or death.

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Although many people associate strokes with older adults, ruptured brain aneurysms can also affect younger individuals.

Clarke's experience is a powerful reminder that serious neurological emergencies are not limited to the elderly.

She Survived the Bleeding—Then Lost the Ability to Speak

After her first emergency procedure, Clarke faced another terrifying complication.

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She developed aphasia.

Aphasia is a language disorder that can affect a person's ability to speak, understand words, read, or write.

For an actress whose career depended on memorizing dialogue and delivering emotionally complex performances, the experience was devastating.

At one point, she struggled to remember her own name.

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Clarke later described the emotional distress of being unable to communicate normally and the fear that her acting career might be over.

Fortunately, her language abilities gradually returned.

But even as her physical recovery progressed, she faced another problem.

Doctors had identified a second aneurysm that had not yet ruptured.

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This meant that despite surviving her first medical emergency, she was living with the knowledge that another potentially dangerous blood vessel abnormality remained in her brain.

A Second Brain Crisis Struck in 2013

Two years later, Clarke faced another frightening medical ordeal.

In 2013, doctors discovered that the second aneurysm had grown.

They recommended treatment to address the risk.

Initially, the plan involved a less invasive procedure performed through blood vessels rather than opening the skull.

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However, complications developed during treatment, including significant bleeding.

Clarke required emergency open-brain surgery.

Her recovery was physically painful and emotionally exhausting.

She experienced severe anxiety and uncertainty about her future.

At the same time, *Game of Thrones* was becoming one of the most successful television series in the world.

The contrast between her public success and private medical struggles could hardly have been greater.

Fans saw a rising international star.

Behind the scenes, she was recovering from potentially fatal brain injuries.

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The Moment She Feared Her Career Was Over

Recovering from a brain hemorrhage involves much more than surviving the initial emergency.

Patients may experience fatigue, memory difficulties, headaches, changes in concentration, emotional disturbances, and other neurological symptoms.

For Clarke, returning to acting created additional pressure.

She worried about whether she could remember lines, perform under demanding conditions, and meet the expectations of a major television production.

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In a 2024 interview, she discussed how brain injury can profoundly affect a person’s confidence and sense of identity.

She also acknowledged fears about losing her job because of her health.

These concerns are not unique to celebrities.

Many survivors of stroke and acquired brain injury experience difficulties returning to employment, managing daily responsibilities, and rebuilding their confidence.

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Physical survival is only one part of recovery.

Emotional support, rehabilitation, and practical assistance can be equally important.

7 Warning Signs of a Brain Aneurysm Rupture You Should Never Ignore

A ruptured brain aneurysm requires immediate emergency treatment.

Symptoms often develop suddenly and can be severe.

1. A Sudden, Extremely Severe Headache

A classic warning sign of subarachnoid hemorrhage is a thunderclap headache.

This type of headache reaches maximum intensity within seconds or about a minute.

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People often describe it as the worst headache they have ever experienced.

A sudden, explosive headache should never be dismissed as a routine migraine without medical assessment.

2. Nausea and Vomiting

Sudden vomiting accompanying an unusually severe headache can be a warning sign of bleeding around the brain.

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Clarke experienced vomiting during her first medical emergency.

Vomiting by itself is common and often harmless, but when combined with a thunderclap headache, it requires urgent attention.

3. A Stiff or Painful Neck

Blood irritating the tissues surrounding the brain may cause neck stiffness.

This symptom can develop alongside severe headache, nausea, and sensitivity to light.

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4. Sudden Vision Changes

Some people experience blurred vision, double vision, or other sudden visual disturbances.

An unruptured aneurysm can occasionally affect nearby nerves, particularly when it grows large enough to compress surrounding structures.

5. Loss of Consciousness

A severe rupture may cause fainting, collapse, or loss of consciousness.

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This can indicate significant neurological injury or a sudden disturbance in brain function.

6. Seizures

Some patients experience seizures when bleeding affects brain tissue.

A new seizure, particularly alongside sudden headache or neurological symptoms, requires emergency evaluation.

7. Sudden Confusion, Weakness, or Speech Difficulties

Bleeding in or around the brain can interfere with normal neurological function.

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Warning signs may include difficulty speaking, confusion, weakness, numbness, or problems with coordination.

These symptoms may also indicate other types of stroke.

Important: A sudden thunderclap headache, even without other symptoms, is a medical emergency. Call emergency services immediately. Do not drive yourself to the hospital or wait to see whether the pain improves.

Can a Brain Aneurysm Exist Without Symptoms?

Yes.

Many unruptured cerebral aneurysms produce no symptoms at all.

Some are discovered incidentally during brain scans performed for unrelated reasons.

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Others may remain undetected throughout a person's lifetime.

Not every aneurysm will rupture.

Doctors assess factors such as its size, location, shape, growth, and the patient's medical history before recommending treatment or monitoring.

In certain cases, regular imaging may be appropriate.

In others, surgical clipping or endovascular treatment may be recommended to reduce rupture risk.

These decisions require individualized assessment by specialists.

Who Is at Greater Risk of a Brain Aneurysm?

Several factors are associated with the development or rupture of cerebral aneurysms.

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These include:

- High blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking
- Family history of cerebral aneurysms

- Certain inherited connective tissue disorders
- Polycystic kidney disease
- Increasing age
- Certain vascular abnormalities

Women are diagnosed with cerebral aneurysms more frequently than men.

However, an aneurysm can occur in someone without obvious risk factors.

Clarke's case demonstrates that being young, physically active, and professionally successful does not eliminate the possibility of a serious neurological condition.

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Can Brain Aneurysms Be Prevented Naturally?

There is no proven herb, supplement, detox protocol, or specific food that can reliably prevent or eliminate a cerebral aneurysm.

Nevertheless, certain lifestyle measures can support overall vascular health and may reduce some established risk factors.

Manage Blood Pressure

High blood pressure can place additional stress on blood vessel walls.

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Regular monitoring and appropriate treatment are important, especially for people with hypertension.

Avoid Smoking

Smoking is a significant modifiable risk factor associated with aneurysm formation and rupture.

Quitting smoking provides important benefits for both brain and cardiovascular health.

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Maintain Regular Physical Activity

Routine physical activity supports blood pressure regulation and general cardiovascular function.

People with known aneurysms should discuss exercise restrictions and suitable activity levels with their treating specialist.

Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet

A balanced eating pattern rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, and unsaturated fats can support vascular health.

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Reducing excessive sodium intake may help people manage elevated blood pressure.

Discuss Family History With Your Doctor

People with multiple close relatives affected by cerebral aneurysms may benefit from discussing screening with a healthcare professional.

Routine screening is not recommended for everyone.

Avoid Unproven Brain Detox Claims

Products advertised as cleansing brain arteries, dissolving aneurysms, or preventing strokes naturally should be approached with caution.

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There is no credible evidence that such products can repair a weakened brain artery.

How Emilia Clarke Turned Her Experience Into a Mission

For years, Clarke kept her health struggles away from the public.

In 2019, she published a deeply personal account of her experiences and introduced SameYou, a charity focused on improving recovery and rehabilitation services for people affected by brain injuries and strokes.

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Her advocacy highlights a problem that often receives less attention than emergency medical treatment.

Surviving a brain injury does not necessarily mean a person has fully recovered.

Many patients experience long-term physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges after leaving the hospital.

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Some struggle to return to work.

Others face fatigue, anxiety, depression, communication problems, and difficulty performing activities that once felt effortless.

Through SameYou, Clarke has sought to increase awareness and improve rehabilitation opportunities.

In later interviews, she has spoken about the emotional impact of surviving such serious medical events and the importance of support during recovery.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(158); });
Her experience has become an example of how a frightening personal health crisis can lead to advocacy for others.

The Hidden Side of Recovery That Many People Never See

When someone survives a life-threatening brain injury, friends and family may assume the worst is over once the patient returns home.

But neurological recovery can take months or years.

Some survivors look physically healthy while continuing to experience significant challenges.

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Common difficulties may include mental fatigue, difficulty concentrating, slower processing speed, emotional changes, or increased sensitivity to stress.

These problems are not always visible.

Rehabilitation can involve speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychological support, and specialist medical follow-up.

The treatment plan depends on the nature and severity of the injury.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(160); });
For Clarke, the experience changed her understanding of vulnerability, recovery, and the importance of accessing appropriate care.

Her story reminds us that recovery is not always a straight line.

Why Her Story Matters Beyond Hollywood

Emilia Clarke's experience is remarkable, but the medical lessons extend far beyond the entertainment industry.

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A brain aneurysm can remain silent until it becomes a medical emergency.

When rupture occurs, early recognition and rapid treatment can be lifesaving.

Understanding the difference between an ordinary headache and a sudden, extremely severe headache may help someone seek medical care when it matters most.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(162); });
Her story also challenges the assumption that serious cerebrovascular problems only affect older adults.

And perhaps most importantly, it highlights the long and often invisible road that survivors travel after emergency treatment ends.

Final Thoughts: She Played a Queen, but Her Greatest Battle Happened Off Screen

Emilia Clarke became internationally famous for portraying one of television's most powerful fictional characters.

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Yet her most challenging battles unfolded away from the cameras.

At just 24, she survived a ruptured brain aneurysm.

Two years later, she underwent another dangerous medical ordeal that required emergency brain surgery.

She faced difficulties with speech, painful recovery, and fears about whether she would ever return to the career she loved.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(164); });
Today, her experience continues to help raise awareness about brain injuries, stroke recovery, and the importance of rehabilitation.

Her story is not proof that every headache signals a dangerous condition.

But it is a powerful reminder that certain symptoms must never be ignored.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(165); });
A sudden, explosive headache that feels unlike anything you have experienced before may be more than a headache. Recognizing that difference—and acting quickly—could save a life.

Medical Disclaimer: This article is provided for educational and informational purposes only and does not replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Brain aneurysm rupture and subarachnoid hemorrhage are medical emergencies. Seek immediate emergency assistance for sudden, unusually severe headaches, loss of consciousness, seizures, or other acute neurological symptoms.

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