



Mercy Health  
Care first

## Your important health information

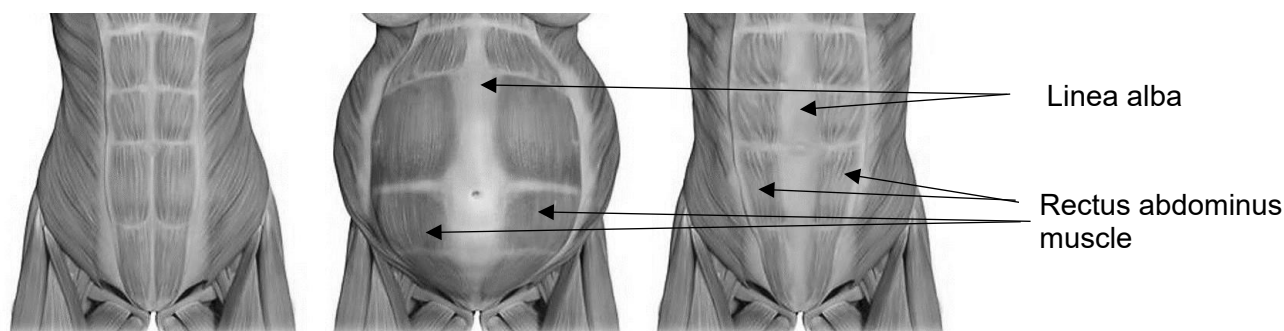
# DRAM

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### What is DRAM?

DRAM (Diastasis of the Rectus Abdominis Muscle) is the normal widening and stretching of the abdominal connective tissue (linea alba) in the midline during pregnancy. The stretching increases the distance between the left and right abdominal muscles. All pregnant women will experience some degree of stretching and widening. Women may notice this during pregnancy or after birth. The connective tissue may also bulge outwards during movement, lifting or exercise – this is termed ‘doming’.

### Image showing abdominal muscles and connective tissue



Before pregnancy

Pregnancy DRAM

DRAM after birth

### What causes DRAM?

Pregnancy hormones soften the body’s abdominal tissues allowing them to stretch with the growth of the baby. This is a normal process. Activities that use the abdominal muscles such as heavy lifting, constipation and straining on the toilet, or doing difficult abdominal exercises may also contribute to the stretching and ‘doming’.

### How will having DRAM affect me?

Some women dislike the look of their abdomen after birth. Evidence shows there’s **no** correlation between a DRAM and low back pain, pelvic organ prolapse or urinary incontinence.

### Will my DRAM fully recover after birth?

DRAM and ‘doming’ will naturally reduce in most women in the first 8-12 weeks after birth. Some women require further abdominal muscle strengthening exercises to lessen ‘doming’ and return to their desired levels of exercise.

## What can I do about DRAM during pregnancy and after birth?

### 1. Avoid and modify any movements or exercises that cause 'doming' in the midline

Common activities that cause 'doming' are: sit-ups, sitting up to get out of bed, lifting, pushing or pulling heavy weights or heavy housework.

### 2. Move well during pregnancy and after birth

- Roll onto your side to get out of bed.
- Try contracting your pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles before pushing, pulling, or lifting to reduce 'doming'. Avoid holding your breath with these activities.
- Modify gym exercises that cause 'doming'. Try a lighter weight or different exercise starting position.
- After birth avoid, or ask for help with, heavy lifting and housework, particularly in the first 6 weeks.

### 3. Healthy bowel habits

- Drink adequate amounts of fluid, especially water.
- Eat a diet high in fibre with lots of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains.
- Adopt a good toileting position (see picture). Knees higher than hips, lean forward with a straight spine and rest your elbows on your knees.
- Do not strain when opening your bowels.



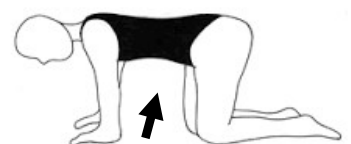
### 4. Abdominal exercises

Abdominal exercises can strengthen the deep abdominal muscles and connective tissue in the midline.

- Lie on your side, contract the pelvic floor muscles and draw in the lower part of the tummy (without moving your back or pelvis) - keep breathing normally.
- Hold for five seconds and then relax completely, repeat five times.
- Gradually build up to 10 second holds, repeat 10 times.
- Repeat three times per day.



As you get stronger, try this exercise in different positions, for example on your hands and knees, while sitting or standing. Add a single arm or leg movement to further challenge the abdominals.



Following your 6 week check up with your doctor, you can return to other abdominal exercises.

If you continue to have difficulty with 'doming', seek additional support from your doctor or a physiotherapist.

## 5. General exercise

- During pregnancy, if you and your baby are healthy, it's recommended to be active on most days of the week for 30 to 60 minutes of moderate intensity activity **or** 15 to 30 minutes of vigorous intensity activity.
- After birth gradually increase low impact exercise as able.
- Low-impact exercise includes walking, using the exercise bike or cross-trainer.
- Swimming is also suitable in pregnancy and after your 6 week medical check-up after birth.
- Ask your medical care giver for more advice if you have a high-risk pregnancy or birth complications.

## 6. Abdominal support wear

- Evidence shows abdominal support wear does not reduce your DRAM further than natural recovery.
- Many women find abdominal support wear comfortable in pregnancy and/or as they recover following delivery.
- Wear comfortable abdominal support wear such as 'Tubigrip', high support briefs or high bike shorts during the day during pregnancy, and for 6 weeks after the birth of your baby.
- Take support wear off at night.
- Tight, rigid abdominal binders are not recommended.
- Remove any abdominal support wear that causes pain, discomfort or pelvic pressure.
- 6 weeks after birth reduce the amount of time you wear support wear and increase your abdominal exercises.
- Abdominal support wear can be purchased from many shops such as; Target, Kmart, Cotton On, Best & Less etc. Other popular brands include [www.srchealth.com](http://www.srchealth.com), [www.solidea.com.au](http://www.solidea.com.au).
- There is no evidence supporting one material or type over another therefore we do not recommend or endorse a particular brand.



## Seek help if you have other symptoms

Urinary incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse and DRAM are common conditions in pregnancy and after birth and require specific exercises or modifications.

A community health centre physiotherapist or private physiotherapist can help to further guide your DRAM recovery.

Search for a local private physiotherapist here; <https://cfaphysios.com.au/practice-locator>

Search for your local community health centre physiotherapist here;  
<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/communityhealth/community-health-directory/>

Contact the Mercy Hospital for Women/Werribee Mercy Hospital Physiotherapy Department if you are experiencing urinary incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse symptoms.

### **Mercy Hospital for Women**

Phone; 03 8458 4141

### **Werribee Mercy Hospital**

Phone: 03 8754 3150

## **Additional resources**

For more information on your recovery after birth, look at the '**Physiotherapy Postnatal Care**' booklet, which is given on the ward and the parent education resources on the Mercy Health website.

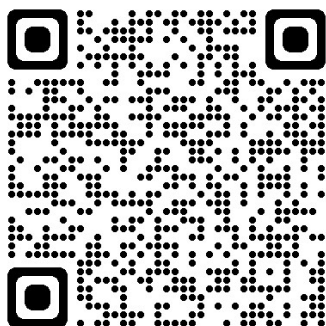
[https://health-services.mercyhealth.com.au/patients-and-visitors/supporting-yourvisit/parent\\_education/](https://health-services.mercyhealth.com.au/patients-and-visitors/supporting-yourvisit/parent_education/)

We have developed a series of videos which contain valuable information about your recovery after childbirth.

These videos should be watched as soon as possible after the birth of your baby.

Access videos via this QR code or follow the link:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsPvysJbVI2M\\_gsUo4cAqKcB69\\_8mRvP0](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsPvysJbVI2M_gsUo4cAqKcB69_8mRvP0)



### **Further Information**

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact **Physiotherapy Department**

**Mercy Hospital for Women** Phone;  
03 8458 4141

**Werribee Mercy Hospital** Phone: 03 8754 3150

### **Acknowledgements**

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This document provides general information only and is not intended to replace advice about your health from a qualified practitioner. If you are concerned about your health, you should seek advice from a qualified practitioner.