



Your important health information

DRAM

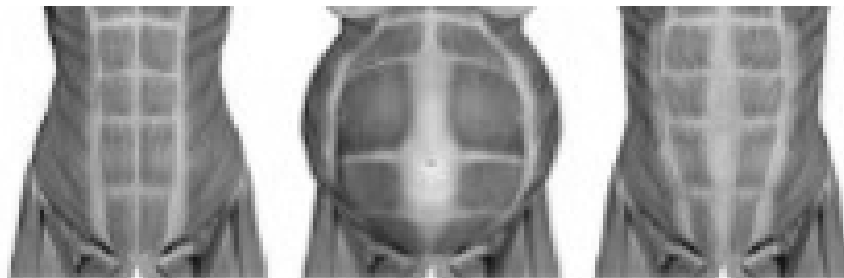
What is DRAM?

DRAM (Diastasis Rectus Abdominis Muscle) is the stretching of the abdominal muscles at the midline.

All pregnant women will experience some degree of stretching. It usually appears during pregnancy but is most commonly noticed postnatally.

The soft tissue (linea alba) in the midline may also bulge outwards during movement or lifting

Abdominal muscles



What DRAM?	Before Pregnancy	Pregnancy DRAM	Postnatal DRAM	causes
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- Hormones released during pregnancy soften the body's abdominal tissues allowing them to stretch with the growth of the baby.
- Activities that use the abdominal muscles such as straining with heaving lifting, constipation or doing a sit-up action may contribute to the stretching.

What are some of the factors that increase the chances of developing a DRAM?

- Excessive weight gain during pregnancy or excessive amniotic fluid (water surrounding the baby).
- Multiple birth pregnancies and large babies.
- Previous abdominal surgery.
- Shorter periods of time between pregnancies.
- Inadequate exercise and recovery after each pregnancy.

How will having DRAM affect me?

- It can affect your posture and change how you move.
- Some women dislike the look of their abdominals and DRAM.
- You may be more likely to have low back pain or pelvic girdle pain or an umbilical (belly button) hernia.
- You may also experience urinary incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse.

→ A Physiotherapist can help if you also experience these conditions.

How can I prevent my DRAM getting worse?

- Avoid excessive strain on the abdominal tissues.
- Avoid sit-up movements during pregnancy and for at least 6 weeks after delivery:
 - Roll to the side to get into and out of bed.
 - Modify any exercise that causes your DRAM separation to bulge outwards.
- Avoid heavy lifting:
 - Avoid heavy housework, heavy cleaning and pushing, pulling or lifting heavy weights at the gym.
 - If you must lift, brace and tighten your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles prior to and during lifting.
 - Lift nothing heavier than your baby for at least 6 weeks after delivery.
- Avoid constipation and straining on the toilet:
 - Ensure adequate fluid intake, especially water.
 - Ensure a high fibre diet with lots of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains.
 - Adopt an appropriate 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.



What can I do to help DRAM recovery?

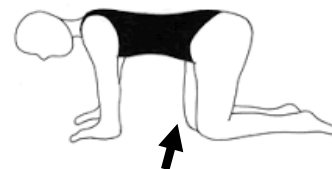
- Ensure good posture while sitting, standing and walking.
- Wear abdominal support such as 'Tubigrip', high support briefs or high bike shorts during the day and for 6 weeks after the birth of your baby.
- Complete exercises for general fitness and your abdominals (see instructions below).
- Prevent worsening the DRAM by following the points listed above.

What exercises are safe and recommended if I have DRAM?

- Exercising during pregnancy is important and has been associated with a reduced DRAM. Exercise after the baby is born can help to improve DRAM.
- Low-impact exercise such as walking, exercise bike or cross-trainer is recommended for pregnancy and the first 12 weeks postnatal for 30-60mins per day, most days of the week. Swimming is also suitable in pregnancy and after your 6 week medical check-up after having the baby. Consult your medical care giver for more advice if you have a high-risk pregnancy or birth complications.
- Ensure good posture while you exercise, check that your DRAM is not bulging outwards in the midline.

What exercises are safe and recommended if I have DRAM?

- The following abdominal exercise will help to strengthen the deep abdominal muscles (transversus abdominis) that support the abdomen and low back.
- On hands and knees with your back straight, draw in the lower part of the tummy towards the spine (without moving your back or pelvis) keep breathing normally. (See picture)
- Hold for 5 seconds and then relax completely
- Repeat 5 times
- Gradually build up to 10 holds of 10 seconds
- Repeat 3 times per day
- As you get stronger, try this exercise while sitting or standing. Perform this exercise frequently throughout the day, for example, tighten as you lift your baby or pram



The abdominal muscles work together with your pelvic floor muscles. Ensure you are completing your pelvic floor exercises 3 times per day too. For more information consult your booklets *Exercise in Pregnancy, Physiotherapy Postnatal Care* or your physiotherapist.

Will my DRAM fully recover?

- The hormones of pregnancy decrease quickly after your baby's birth, but the effect on your abdomen takes time to reverse. DRAM will reduce in most women by 8 to 12 weeks after birth of their baby.
- A DRAM may not disappear entirely, especially without a specific exercise program. Even when the muscles are much stronger, they may lie slightly apart.
- Women with significant muscle stretching or visible abdominal bulging should return to a physiotherapist for re-assessment at 6 weeks after birth.

Attend you DRAM re-assessment at 6 weeks after birth at:

Mercy Hospital for Women Heidelberg	Physiotherapy Postnatal class When: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9:30am-10:30am (excluding public holidays) Where: Level 3, Seminar Room 2, Mercy Hospital for Women
Werribee Mercy Hospital	Physiotherapy Postnatal class When: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10:00am-10:30am (excluding public holidays) Where: Maternity Unit Lounge (opposite rooms 21-24), Maternity Ward, Werribee Mercy Hospital

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact

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