



Dr Johnny Kwei

MBBS (Hons), BSc (Med Sc),
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Consultant Plastic Surgeon

Dr Kwei's special interests include:

Breast surgery

- Breast reduction surgery
- Breast lift surgery
- Breast reconstruction post breast cancer
- Male gynaecomastia

Abdominal surgery

- Abdominoplasty post weight loss, pregnancy

Skin cancer surgery and reconstruction

- Including melanoma

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Post Pregnancy Abdominal Bulging

A Case Study by Dr Johnny Kwei

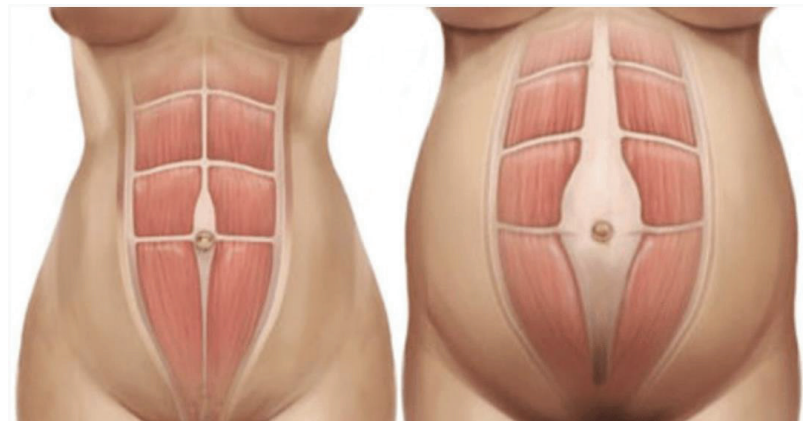
A 40 year old woman with three children, who has an active healthy lifestyle presents with abdominal swelling. She first noticed this after her second pregnancy, and at the same time she started experiencing lower back pain, which has gotten worse over the years. She presents to you concerned she may have a large hernia.

How would you manage her?

Cause of abdominal bulging

Abdominal bulging is quite commonly seen post pregnancy, especially if the mother has had two pregnancies or more. This is due to the separation of the rectus muscle of the abdominal wall, known as rectus divarication. Normally the rectus muscle is separated by approximately 1cm but during pregnancy the central rectus sheath (linea alba) stretches to accommodate for the growth of the baby. Although the sheath is elastic and after the baby is delivered, the stretched sheath attempts to return to normal, a portion of it remains permanently stretched. This is further compounded by subsequent pregnancies.

Other causes which need to be excluded on history taking includes previous abdominal surgery and significant weight gain. A full abdominal examination should be performed, especially to examine for hernias.



Rectus Divarication

A stretched linea alba not only leads to bulging of the abdomen, it can also lead to rectus muscle weakness and lower back pain, due to the ineffective muscle function. The rectus muscle is part of the core muscle group that helps stabilise the spine. Lower back pain results when the para-spinal muscle over work the lower spine.



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Urinary incontinence can also result from the ineffective function of these essential core muscles. And it is also common to discover peri-umbilical hernias in patients post pregnancy due to thinning of the rectus sheath.

Treatment

If there are no other suspicious causes to the abdominal bulging found on examination or imaging. Core muscle strengthening exercises can initially be trialed to improve the symptoms.

Surgical repair of the linea alba is the definitive treatment and this is done in conjunction with an abdominoplasty approach.

When to refer onto a plastic surgeon

- Severe weakness sitting up or getting out of bed
- Peri-umbilical hernia in conjunction with rectus divarication
- Preference of definitive repair of the rectus divarication

