

Rectus Abdominis Strain

The rectus abdominis muscle is the large muscle located in the center of your abdomen, commonly known as the six-pack. It extends from the front of the pubic bone all the way to the ribs. Injuries to this muscle can occur in varying degrees. Minor strains result in the muscle being stretched, while a major strain results in complete tears or ruptures, and it might also trigger bleeding and an abdominal hernia.

Even though it is entirely possible to strain other muscles inside of the abdomen, most of the strains will involve the rectus abdominis. If you engage in any athletic activities or physical labor, you are at an increased risk of straining the abdomen. Lifting heavy objects and twisting suddenly can cause a labor-related strain. Weightlifting, pole-vaulting, playing hockey, skating, swimming and doing sit-ups can also cause strains to this muscle.

For those who are out of shape or overweight, you can develop this strain if you do any physical activities without preparing properly. In certain instances, energetic sneezing or prolonged sneezing and coughing can also trigger one of these strains.

Rectus Abdominis Strain Anatomy

The rectus abdominis is one of the four main components that make up the abdominal musculature. The other muscles are the transversus abdominis, which lies deep within the abdomen and the external and internal obliques, which sit in pairs along either side of the rectus abdominis. The main purpose of the rectus abdominis is allowing you to move the part of your body between the ribcage and the pelvis. When you look at the muscle externally, it forms the classic six-pack when the abdomen is well-toned.

How to Treat a Rectus Abdominis Strain:

1. Rest

For those suffering with a first or second-degree strain, taking the time to rest and refrain from engaging in those activities that caused pain in the first place is often beneficial. Avoid sit-ups, crunches, or other abdominal exercises until the pain has resolved, or until you have seen your physiotherapist or manual therapist. Avoid lifting or straining.

2. See Your Doctor

You should get an appointment with your doctor or general practitioner to check that you do not have an abdominal or inguinal hernia. The abdominal hernia tends to occur near to the belly button, and the inguinal hernia just above the groin. Both can feel like a muscle strain. If you notice pain while coughing, straining, or on exertion, then definitely get it checked for a hernia.

3. Ice

Apply ice to the area for 5-10 minutes at a time three to five times per day. Make sure to wrap the ice in a thin towel to prevent an ice burn from occurring on the skin.

4. Back Brace/Support

A brace or support will give you extra support around the abdomen and spine, especially if you are lifting (which you should avoid!).

5. Physiotherapy/Manual Therapy

Physio and massage can help with the pain, and stimulate tissue repair. Strengthening exercises can commence once the healing has started.

Tips:

- Whenever lifting anything heavy, make sure to practice proper lifting techniques to avoid causing injury to the midsection.
- For those who are overweight and out of shape, try to lose a few pounds and ease into physical activity so as to avoid injuring yourself.
- If you are doing any athletic activity, take the time to warm-up before rushing into a routine.
- Anytime you are participating in an athletic event, pay attention to your body. If you start to feel pain, you need to stop and give the body a chance to recover to prevent strains.
- Avoid sit-ups or abdominal strengthening exercises until advised by your doctor or therapist.