

PATIENT INFORMATION

Diastasis of Rectus Abdominis Muscles (DRAM) Postpartum

What is separation of the abdominal muscles?

In pregnancy the abdominal (six-pack) muscles stretch to give room for the baby to grow. For some women these muscles stretch to the point of separating along their midline (linea alba). This separation is called Diastasis Recti. You may notice a gap in your abdominal muscles, particularly when sitting up from a lying position or leaning forward in the bath. When this happens, you may see a visible “peak”, also called “doming”. Most pregnant women will have a small separation of one to two fingers’ width after pregnancy, in most cases the muscles come back together within a few weeks, this is not a problem. However, if the gap at the midline is more than two fingers’ width and has a visible bulge you may have a DRAM and need to discuss this with a physiotherapist.

How can I tell if I have a diastasis rectus?

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Have your top rolled up so you can see your tummy



Tuck your chin down and gently lift your head and shoulders off from the floor. If you see doming (bulging) down the middle of your tummy you are likely to have Diastasis Rectus Abdominis



The physiotherapist will feel your muscles at rest and while you activate them. They will measure the gap between your tummy muscles at your belly button and 2 inches above and below.

What can you do to help?

- Avoid all strenuous exercises that cause your abdominal wall to bulge.
- Avoid heavy lifting or bending, if you have to then activate your Deep Tummy Muscles before you do this (exercise 1).
- Avoid straining on the toilet.
- Avoid sit ups or crunches, until you have been assessed and given guidance.
- When getting out of bed, roll on to your side first before pushing up.
- Start exercises to strengthen your deep core muscles.
- Some women find stomach supports useful to help activate your tummy muscles and support your posture initially. Do not wear these all the time.
- If coughing intensely, cross your arms over your tummy and squeeze your pelvic floor.
- Avoid holding your baby on one hip

What exercises can I do?

It is important to do these exercises on a regular, daily basis.

You should start with exercising your deep tummy muscles, these are your “core” and act like an inner corset.

Exercise 1 – Deep Tummy Muscles (Transverse Abdominus)

- Lie on your back or your side with your knees bent up
- Place your fingers on your lower abdominal wall, just inside your pelvic bones
- Imagine you are wearing a low-slung belt across your hips
- Breathe in and let your tummy relax
- Breathe out and gently draw in the lower part of your abdomen (tummy) towards your spine. Imagine you are trying to do the belt up a few notches.
- Do not move your back or your pelvis as you do this.
- Build up gradually, aiming to hold the muscle for 5-10 seconds, remember to keep breathing. Repeat the exercise 5-10 times with a few seconds rest in between each one.



Exercise 2 – Bent Knee Fall Outs

- Lie on your back with your knees bent
- Activate your deep tummy muscles as above and hold this tension
- Gently lower your right knee down towards the floor (keep your left knee bent and pointing up towards the ceiling)
- Keep your pelvis stable throughout this exercise – try to avoid trunk rotation
- Return your right leg to starting position.
- Relax your deep tummy muscles
- Repeat 5-10 exercises on each side



Exercise 3 – Heel Slides

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat
- Activate your deep tummy muscles as above and hold this tightness
- Straighten your right leg slowly, sliding your foot along the floor, and then return to the starting position when you feel your lower back begin to arch
- Repeat 5-10 times on each side



Exercise 4 – Pelvic Tilts

- Lie on your back
- Activate your deep tummy muscles as above and hold this tightness
- Round your lower back and roll your pelvis backwards, you will feel like you are squashing an imaginary ball between your back and the floor. Stay in that position for a few seconds
- Gently return to the starting position
- Repeat 10 times
- You can also do these exercise



Exercise 5 – Bridges

- Lie on your back
- Activate your deep tummy muscles as above and hold this tightness
- Round your lower back and roll your pelvis backwards, you will feel like you are squashing an imaginary ball between your back and the floor.
- Keep on rolling so you gradually peel your tail bone and then your pelvis off the matt. This should gently raise your bottom off the matt.
- Hold for 5-10 seconds.
- Gently roll/curl your back and pelvis back down onto the matt.
- Repeat 10 times.



How and when can I progress these exercises?

Only do these following exercises if your tummy doesn't bulge while doing them and if you are able to do the exercises above with ease.

Exercise 6 – Bridge Progression

- Repeat exercise 5. Whilst holding this position, straighten your right leg and hold for a few seconds.
- Repeat with your left leg and hold for a few seconds.
- Lower your pelvis gently back down.
- Repeat 10 times.



Exercise 7 – 4-point kneeling



- On your hands and knees (with your wrists positioned directly under your shoulders and your knees directly under your hips). Check that your back is in a neutral position.
- Activate your deep tummy muscles as above and hold this tightness.
- You can make this exercise harder by lifting alternate arms, then alternate legs and finally trying opposite arm and leg lifts.

Exercise 8 – Gentle sit-up/head and shoulder lift



- Lie on your back with your knees slightly bent and your feet flat and hip width apart.
- When starting this exercise, “hug yourself” by crossing your hands over your tummy as if you were “closing” the gap between your abdominal muscles.
- Gently pull your hands together as you lift your head up slightly.
- Keep your chin tucked in to avoid neck strain.
- Hold for a few seconds and control the movement slowly.
- Repeat 10 times.

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.