

What is Diastasis Rectus Abdominis?

In pregnancy, the tummy (abdominal) muscles stretch to allow room for the baby to grow. This causes the muscles to separate along their midline (linea alba).

The muscles affected are the 'six-pack' muscles (rectus abdominis muscles). You may notice a gap, particularly when sitting up from a lying down position. When this happens, you may see a visible peak, '**doming**' and this is what you may hear referred to as a tummy gap or diastasis rectus abdominis (DRA).

After a pregnancy DRA is common, it does not usually cause a problem and in most cases, the muscles come back together within a few weeks. However, if the gap persists long term it can cause tummy or back pain. This happens more commonly if your baby was large, if you had a twin or triplet pregnancy, or if you have had several pregnancies.

How can I tell if I have DRA?

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
- Tuck your chin in towards your chest and gently lift your head and shoulders up as you breathe out.
- If you have Diastasis Rectus, you will see **doming** down the middle of your tummy. Have a feel of your tummy, can you feel a gap in the middle that is wider than two fingers width, or do your fingers sink deep in your tummy?

Things to consider if you had DRA

- Avoid all strenuous exercises that cause your tummy to dome
- When bending forward, activate your Deep Tummy Muscles (Exercise 1) first.
- Avoid heavy lifting or bending. If you **have** to lift, make sure you lift correctly:
 - ✓ Keep your back straight
 - ✓ Bend your knees
 - ✓ Keep a 'wide base' with your feet
 - ✓ Don't ever stoop or twist to lift
 - ✓ Try to draw in your tummy muscles to avoid or reduce any 'doming'
 - ✓ Don't hold your breath
- Avoid constipation and straining on the toilet, try adding fibre to your diet and drinking plenty

- Avoid aggressive tummy exercises that strain on the middle of your tummy such as sit ups, crunches or rising from a lying position by pulling up and twisting at the same time
- When getting out of bed, roll on to your side then push up, avoiding the 'sit up' motion
- Avoid holding baby on one hip. Keep your posture symmetrical while your body recovers
- Tubigrip or stomach supports can be useful to help activate your tummy muscles and support your posture initially, but not for a prolonged time
- When standing and walking try to be as tall as possible, gently drawing your tummy in and tucking your bottom under.
- When sneezing or coughing, initially support your tummy to stop it from doming try to draw in your tummy muscles and lift your pelvic floor muscles
- Start exercises to strengthen your deep core muscles (see below)
- Start with low level strengthening, working on the deep tummy muscles and remember not to breath hold

Exercise 1 – deep tummy muscles

- Lie on your back with your knees bent up and your feet flat
- Keep a gentle natural curve in your lower back region
- Place your fingers on your lower tummy
- Imagine you are wearing a low-slung belt across your hips
- Breathe in and as you breathe out gently draw your tummy button in towards your spine as if you are trying to do a belt up a few more notches. Hold this for a few seconds
- Repeat the above, this time gently tightening your pelvic floor muscles at the same time: as though you were stopping wind and stopping urine. Again, aim to hold this up to 10 seconds and keep breathing normally
- Lastly, repeat the above exercise lying on your side, or even in a sitting or standing position, or on all fours. Aim for a 10 second hold again each position, then let go.



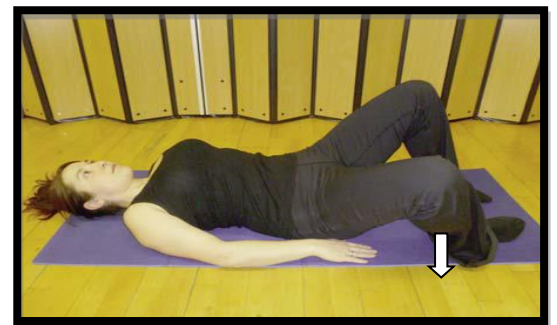
Exercise 2-Pelvic tilt

- Lie on a firm surface, knees slightly bent and your feet flat and hip-width apart
- Breathe in to prepare and as you breathe out gently draw in your tummy and pelvic floor muscles as above
- Now gently 'tilt' your pelvis as though you were zipping up your trousers and flattening the small of your back or
- Release slowly, as though you were 'uncurling' a string of pearls one by one – repeat
- Make sure you don't hold your breath



Exercise 3 - bent knee fall outs

- Start on your back with your knees bent.
- Activate your deep tummy and pelvic floor muscles and gently lower your right knee out to the side - keep your left knee still and pointing upwards towards the ceiling
- Keep your pelvis still throughout this exercise – try to avoid any movement side to side
- Return your right leg to starting position as soon as you detect movement in your trunk
- Relax your deep abdominal muscles
- Repeat 2-3 exercises each side when starting out and build up gradually



Exercise 4 - heel slides

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat
- Activate your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles
- Straighten your right leg slowly, sliding your foot along the floor and then slowly return to starting position when you feel your lower back begin to arch
- Repeat 2-3 exercises each side when starting out

