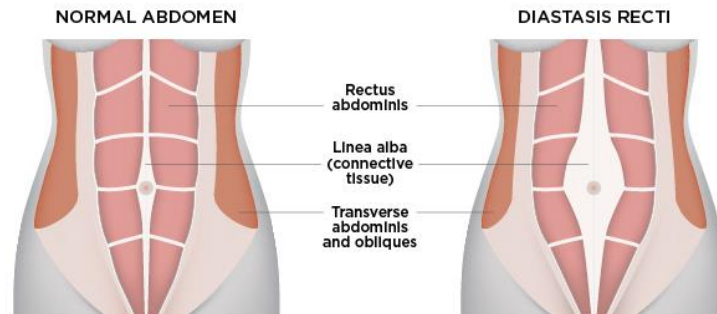


Diastasis Rectus Abdominus (stomach separation)

Diastasis Rectus Abdominus (DRA) is the thinning and widening of the linea alba, which is a thick band of connective tissue in the midline of the abdominal wall.



It is a very common and normal change affecting up to 66-100% of women in the 3rd trimester and should be considered a relatively normal change postpartum unless it is significant.

What is significant?

We all have a 'gap' to start with. The normal distance between the muscles is around 2cm (around one finger width) in women who have never been pregnant. Researchers found that the gap can be considered NORMAL up to 3 cm postpartum. If your tummy separation is larger than this you should continue to follow this advice on this leaflet. A small bulge may be visible called 'doming'. Remember it is not all about the gap, as physios we are concerned about the function of the abdominal wall.

How can I help it?

Support garments

There are a range of support garments available for women postnatal, with the idea of bringing the muscles closer together to facilitate healing. However there is no good quality research to support their use, but that is not to say some women find them very beneficial in the early weeks following birth. Your Physiotherapist can guide you on recommendations.

Exercise

Current physiotherapy practice is based on establishing correct activation of the deeper layers of the abdominal muscles and progression of exercises to work the muscles in a functional way. This is best achieved by an individual assessment and prescription of suitable exercises for you. Postnatal exercise classes are a great way to help recovery from the inside out, for example postnatal Pilates.

You can activate the deep layers of the abdominal muscles by doing the following exercise:

Abdominal Activation

You can do this exercise in a comfortable position e.g. lying on your back with legs bent

- Breath in and relax your tummy
- As you breath out, gently draw in your lower stomach muscles, aim to hold for 5 sec and breath

Posture

Improving posture can help abdominal muscles to work more effectively throughout the day. If you need to lift something make sure use the correct lifting technique – Bend knees, tighten pelvic floor muscles, tighten your deep abdominal muscles and breathe out as you lift.

Good bowel habits

Constant straining or pushing on the toilet may affect or worsen a professional for DRA. You should talk to your health care advice.



affect or worsen a professional for

Top tip would be to use a foot stool to help reduce straining.

If you have any ongoing issues or concerns about your stomach muscles please contact your GP for a pelvic health physiotherapy referral.

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Team, Western Trust