

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy in Postnatal Care – Tummy Muscle Separation (DRAM)



Diastasis Recti (DRAM)

- DRAM stands for diastasis rectus abdominus muscle, also known as diastasis recti. This is where the two halves of one of the tummy muscles called the rectus abdominus, or the 'six pack' muscle, move apart once they are not able to stretch any more. This is because as your baby grows during pregnancy, the muscles in your tummy area start to stretch. It can happen anywhere along the middle of your tummy muscle, from just under your rib cage, to just above your pubic bone

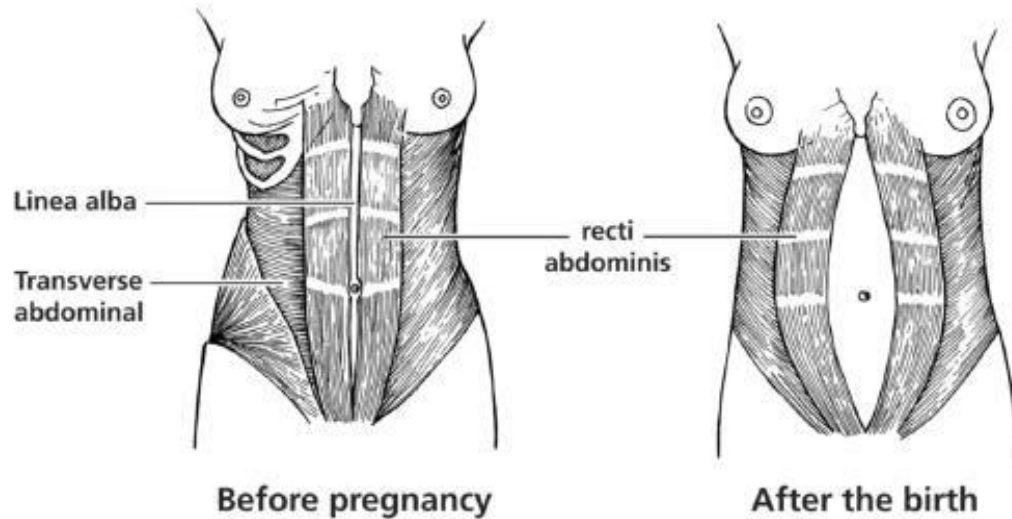


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Diastasis Recti (DRAM)

DRAM is a separation of the abdominal muscles following pregnancy



DRAM can occur for several reasons

- Muscles and soft tissues stretching as your baby grows
- Pregnancy hormones causing the softening of ligaments and connective tissue
- Abdominal muscle weakness
- Large baby / twins / triplets
- Multiple pregnancies causing progressive weakening of the ligaments and soft tissues



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When Should I Address this Problem?

- It is normal for the muscles to separate to a certain extent to allow room for the baby to grow
- Closure of the gap normally occurs on its own by 8-10 weeks postnatally, however in some instances it can take longer to return to normal
- You can get started on the abdominal exercises highlighted above as well as continuing with pelvic floor exercises
- You should seek advice if the gap is more than 2 fingers width or if you notice that your tummy bulges or domes when coughing, moving or changing positions
- Speak to your doctor or midwife if you have any concerns. They can check the size of your gap and refer you to physiotherapy if necessary

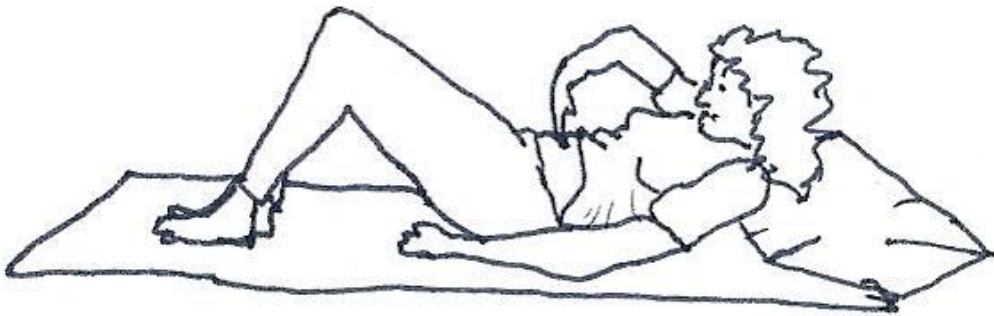


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How Can I Test for Diastasis Recti Myself?

It is important to be able to check your own diastasis gap so you can monitor your progress and / or seek advice if needed



For further info about DRAM, see our ABUHB leaflet in the 'useful resources' section at the end of this presentation

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor

1. Place fingers in a horizontal line just above your belly button.
2. Push down firmly
3. Slowly raise your chin to your chest and lift your shoulders gently off the floor
4. You should feel your fingers sink into the gap between your tightening tummy muscles.
5. How many fingers can you fit into the gap?
6. 2 or less is fine, if more than 2 you need to seek advice and possible referral onto a physiotherapist
7. If you are not sure, ask your midwife, GP or physiotherapist



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The Effects of Pregnancy on the Abdomen

- If your baby was born by Caesarean section, your abdomen may feel sore and weak where the incision was made (*see the scar massage PowerPoint for management of tightness and discomfort in the healed c-section scar*)
- If you had a vaginal delivery, your abdominal muscles will still be weaker than before you had your baby. This is because the muscles will have lengthened and stretched to accommodate your growing baby
- The abdominal muscles form an important part of your 'core', so it is important to try and rebuild their strength postnatally in order to minimize low back pain



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Abdominal Exercises and why do them?



- Your deep tummy muscles help to support your spine
- They also work with your pelvic floor muscles to help support your pelvic organs
- Weak abdominal muscles postnatally can cause low back pain
- Abdominal exercises can help to reduce any separation of the tummy muscles (known as Diastasis Recti or DRAM)



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How to find your Deep Abdominal Muscles

- ☐ Lie on your back with your head on a pillow and with your knees bent, or sit upright in a chair
- ☐ Place your fingertips on the inside of your hip bones and apply a little pressure
- ☐ Breathe in and feel your tummy rise under your hands
- ☐ As you breathe out gently draw your lower tummy in away from your hands, as though squeezing your lower tummy in, away from a tight belt
- ☐ You should feel the deep abdominal muscles tighten and draw in under your hands
- ☐ Aim to hold the contraction for 2 or 3 breaths then relax

If you have had a Caesarean section wait until any drains have been removed and start very gently, when you feel ready. Stop if you experience any discomfort



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How to do Abdominal Exercises

- ☐ You can lie on your back, your side, sit upright in a chair or be on all fours
- ☐ Engage your deep abdominal muscles and carry on breathing normally
- ☐ Start with holding for a couple of breaths and gradually build up
- ☐ Repeat about 5 times in a row and gradually build up to about 10
- ☐ Aim to do them twice daily

How to Use Your Abdominal Muscles



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- ☐ Your abdominal muscles work with your pelvic floor muscles to help to support your spine
- ☐ When you lift your baby, or anything heavy, draw in your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles
- ☐ It's also a good idea to keep the object you're lifting close to you, and to use your leg muscles
- ☐ If you've had a Caesarean section, avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby for at least 6 weeks. If you have a toddler, encourage them to climb up to you when you are sitting down rather than bending to pick them up



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For More Information

- useful websites
 - [Tummy Muscle Separation | POGP \(thepogp.co.uk\)](http://thepogp.co.uk)
- Useful Leaflets
 - [Fit for the Future](#)
 - [Fit and Safe: Exercising in the child-bearing year](#)
 - [Diastasis Recti](#)