

Abdominal Separation (Rectus Diastasis)

Causes -

Rectus diastasis is the separation of the rectus abdominus muscle (your 6 pack muscle). This separation is normal and necessary during pregnancy to allow for your growing belly. In some women, the rectus abdominus will return to *normal* (reconnect) with little effort after giving birth. In other women, it remains separated.

It is estimated that 1 in 3 women (37%) will have abdominal separation after their first pregnancy and 2 in 3 women (67%) who have had multiple pregnancies. This separation can range from 2cm to 20cm wide.

If left untreated after pregnancy, abdominal separation can increase your risk of:

- A saggy tummy
- Hernia
- Weak core
- Pelvic floor issues
- Lower back pain

Treatment –

It is very important that you do not attempt traditional abdominal strengthening exercises (sit ups, planks, v-sits etc) if you have separation. This may worsen your separation and place stress to your lower back and pelvic floor. We recommend specific exercises that you can do to help in a specific order. These exercises start very basic and progress to the more traditional abdominal workouts as you improve.

You (At home)

Here are 2 of the beginner exercises that you can do at home to help strengthen your abdominals *safely* right away. For better results, repeat morning and night.

- Lay on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Draw your belly button in toward your spine (imagine you have been punched in the guts). Hold 10sec x 10.
- On your hands and knees. Draw your belly button in toward your spine (imagine you have been punched in the guts). Hold 10sec x 10.

Start by drawing your tummy in with 30% effort. Build to 100% effort as you are able. While these exercises are appropriate to do immediately post-partum, they should not be painful. **Stop** if you experience any pain.

Your Physiotherapist

You may see our physios at any stage after giving birth, whether it 2weeks or 2months or 2 years. During your assessment, your physio will assess your separation and indicate the degree (often in terms of centimetres). They will then be able to prescribe exercises safe for you at your stage post-partum.

Our physios can:

- Assess the degree of your abdominal separation
- Assess your core strength
- Write and teach you a program of exercises to help reduce your separation
- Check *abdominal doming*
- Pilates if appropriate

In severe cases, the physio may refer you on to a women's health specialist.

When to seek help –

It takes time for your abdominals to return to *normal*, however you may want to see our physios at any stage post-partum.

It is time to see the physio if:

- You would like your abdominal separation or core assessed
- You would like more abdominal strengthening exercises safe for and to help with your separation and core
- You would like clearance before returning to vigorous exercise (sport, gym)
- You are experiencing lower back pain
- You have pelvic floor weakness



PHYSIOTHERAPY + PILATES