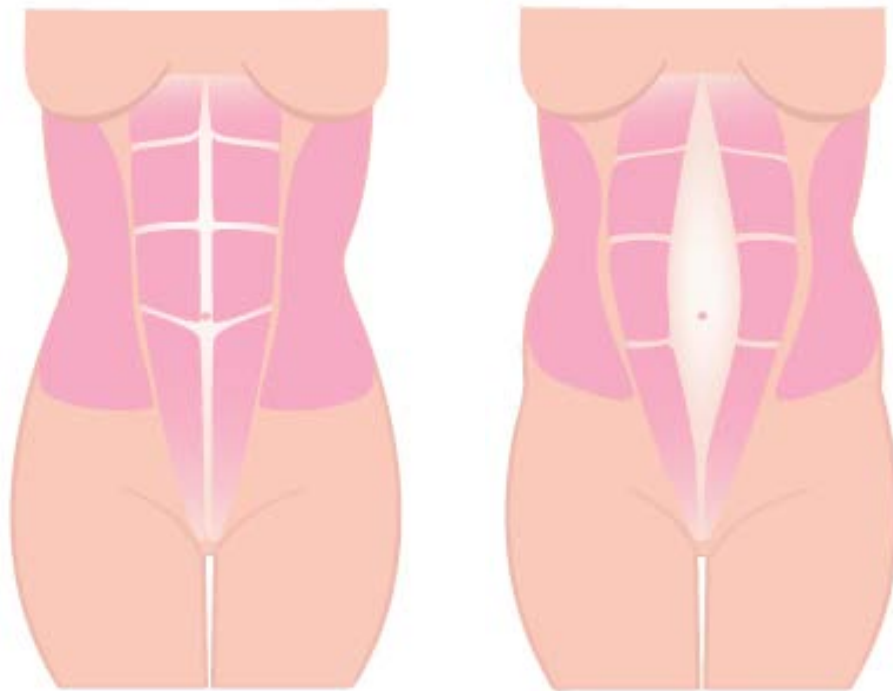


Patient information

Diastasis rectus abdominis



Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy



What does this booklet cover?

This booklet provides information about what Diastasis Rectus Abdominis is, why it occurs, things to look out for and some exercises you can do to help reduce it.

What is diastasis rectus?

While you are pregnant, your abdominal (six-pack) muscles stretch to allow room for your baby to grow. Diastasis rectus is when these tummy muscles over-stretch during pregnancy and separate down the midline.

What causes diastasis rectus?

- Most commonly pregnancy – increased risk with twin or IVF pregnancy due to increased bump size/tissue elasticity.
- Many years of abdominal loading/lifting with poor technique.
- Chronic straining
- Obesity
- Hypermobility
- Multiple pregnancies

How can I tell if I have 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 in towards your chest and gently lift your head and shoulders up from the floor. If you have Diastasis Rectus, you will see **doming** down the middle of your tummy (see picture below). This is your abdominal contents pushing through between your abdominal muscles.



How will your physio measure diastasis rectus?

Your physiotherapist will ask you to lie on your back and feel your tummy muscles while you are relaxed and then while you are activating your tummy muscles. They will measure the gap between your tummy muscles at your belly button and 2 inches above and below.

Do's and don'ts

- Avoid all strenuous exercises that cause your abdominal wall to bulge out
- If you have to bend forward, activate your Deep Tummy Muscles (See Exercise 1) before you do this.
- Avoid heavy lifting or bending.
- Avoid straining on the toilet
- Avoid aggressive abdominal exercises that would put strain on the midline of the abdominals such as sit ups or 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 first before pushing up, avoiding the sit up motion
- Avoid holding baby on one hip
- Start exercises to strengthen your deep core muscles (see below)
- Start with low level strengthening working on the deep tummy muscles first
- Tubigrip or stomach supports can be useful to help activate your tummy muscles and support your posture initially
- Physiotherapy can also teach you more strengthening and stretching exercises that may help.

Exercise 1 – deep tummy muscles



- Lie on your back or your side with your knees bent up and your feet flat
- Keep the normal inward curve in your lower back throughout
- Place your fingers on your lower abdominal wall just inside your pelvic bones
- Imagine you are wearing a low-slung belt across your hips.
- Gently draw in the area between your tummy button and pubic bone towards your spine as if you were trying to do the belt up a few more notches.
- Start by holding this for as long as you can (..... secs)
Relax. Repeat times.
- Increase how long you hold for as you become stronger, up to 10 seconds
- You can also try this exercise in sitting or standing when you feel confident.

Exercise 2 - bent knee fall outs

- Start on your back with your knees bent.
- Activate your deep tummy muscles and gently lower your right knee down towards the floor - keep your left knee bent and pointing upwards towards the ceiling
- Keep your pelvis stable throughout this exercise – try to avoid trunk rotation
- 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.



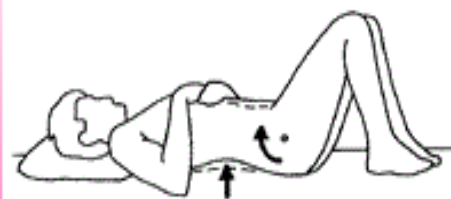
Exercise 3 - heel slides

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat
- Place your fingers to feel your lower abdominal muscles just inside your pelvis and gently activate your deep abdominal 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



Exercise 4 – pelvic tilt

Start lying on the floor. You can also do this sitting on a chair or gym ball. Round your lower back and roll your pelvis backwards over your sitting bones. Feel the stretch in your lower back. Return to the starting position. Repeat times.



Further information?

If your stomach doming or pain does not improve with the exercises or your pain/symptoms increase, please see your physiotherapist or GP for further information.

You may also want to have a look at this article:

<http://dianelee.ca/article-diastasis-rectus-abdominis.php>

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For patient information leaflets on other conditions please visit:
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy

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