Divarication of Abdominal Muscles
Diastasis Recti
Divarication of the Abdominal Muscles

The abdominal muscles keep the internal organs in place as well as supporting the spine. In pregnancy they also support the growing baby and uterus. The abdominal muscles and ligaments stretch throughout pregnancy under the influence of the hormones Progesterone and Relaxin.

The Rectus Abdominus muscles (see illustration) pass from the ribs and breastbone to the pubic bones. They are the most superficial of the abdominal muscles. Below them are the Oblique muscles and Transversus Abdominus. A ligamentous band called the Linea Alba holds the Recti together. This band also softens and stretches as the abdomen enlarges and often allows the Recti to move apart. This separation is called Diastasis or Divarication of the Recti. After the birth of your baby, your abdominal muscles will feel weak and stretched. Relaxin and Progesterone will now start to reduce which will help the ligaments and muscles becoming toned again.
You will be checked postnatally by your midwife or physiotherapist and you will be offered outpatient treatment if the separation does not resolve itself quickly and is found to be 3cms or more.

**Treatment**

Avoid movements which may prevent the separation recovering, such as sitting straight up when getting out of the bath or bed and/or heavy lifting.

There are two gentle exercises we would suggest to tone/strengthen the deep stabilizing muscles whilst the Linea Alba recovers.

**Pelvic floor exercises**

The pelvic floor is like a hammock of muscles suspended from inside the front of your pelvis to the coccyx. There are deep and superficial layers and fast and slow acting fibres. They work with the deep abdominal muscles (Transversus Abdominus) so when you work your pelvic floor the Transversus Abdominus muscles also work.

Try to exercise your pelvic floor several times a day sitting or lying.

The action is to squeeze and lift the pelvic floor, drawing up the back and front passages as though you are trying to control wind and the flow of urine.
There are two ways to work them:

1. Hold for several seconds and repeat several times. Gradually build up to a 10 second ‘hold’ and 10 repetitions.

2. Squeeze and lift then let go quickly. Build up to 10 repetitions.

Each time you exercise, the muscles become stronger and more supportive. You should also contract them before lifting and coughing. When you feel stronger you can do your exercises when standing.

**Transversus Abdominus**

Take a breath in, and then as you breathe out gently draw in your abdominal muscles below your tummy button (imagine you are taking in a notch in a low slung belt). Hold this for several seconds whilst breathing normally. Repeat 5 - 10 times resting between each pull-in. Try to do this exercise several times a day sitting, side-lying or standing.

Your physiotherapist will check your progress and monitor the gap between the muscles before giving you other abdominal exercises to practice. The physiotherapist may also fit you with elasticated abdominal support to make you feel more comfortable and reinforce muscle activity.
References


If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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