

Diastasis Recti

“How do I avoid getting the mommy tummy after having a baby?”

The truth is, every BODY is different, and despite these differences, a diastasis recti, or the separation of one’s abdominal muscles, is common during pregnancy and post-partum. The abdominal wall HAS to stretch to make room for the baby as it grows, and just because you have the baby, it doesn’t mean that the abdominal wall “resets” itself back to normal.

What is a Diastasis Recti?

It is a separation of the rectus abdominal muscles, or more commonly known as the “six pack” muscles, down the middle of the abdomen. According to the literature, 1/3 of pregnant women may experience a thinning of the abdominal muscles that will persist after childbirth. Furthermore, at least 60% of women with a diastasis recti will have pelvic floor dysfunction including pelvic organ prolapse, urinary/fecal incontinence or pelvic girdle pain.

It is easy to check if you have a diastasis on your own. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Place two fingers (side by side) at that level of your naval. Carefully lift your head, then shoulders off of the floor. If you can feel your fingers sink down and there’s a palpable separation of the rectus muscle, you have a diastasis. Some people with crunch up and feel that something is bulging outward, which is also indicative of a separation. A diastasis recti can lead to low back pain, hernia of pelvic organs, or pelvic floor dysfunction including urinary incontinence.

What do you do if you have a Diastasis Recti?

A diastasis recti can be corrected with the appropriate core strengthening exercises. It is important that the core muscle stay strong to protect the separation, and it is important that certain actions are avoided to prevent making things worse.

First -Avoid crunching or sit-ups.

They are over-rated anyways. If you essentially have a “hole in the middle of your abdomen,” does it make sense to work the muscle in the direction that makes the hole worse? By flexing your spine, or “crunching” you are increasing your intra-abdominal pressure, which puts further stress on your organs, abdominals and pelvic floor musculature.

Second-Avoid Valsalva.

A Valsalva is when you hold your breath during strenuous activities such as lifting, having a bowel movement or carrying objects. Instead, think about activating your lower abdominals with lifting or carrying objects for extra support and think about keeping your mouth open and BREATHING to avoid Valsalva.

Lastly- Learn to Breathe!!

Using your diaphragm to guide your abdominal rehabilitation is essential! When you take a deep breath in through the nose and focus on expanding your rib cage in all directions, like a balloon, you are facilitating pelvic floor muscle relaxation and explanation of the abdominals. When you exhale through your mouth, this activates your core, specifically your transverse abdominal and pelvic floor muscles.