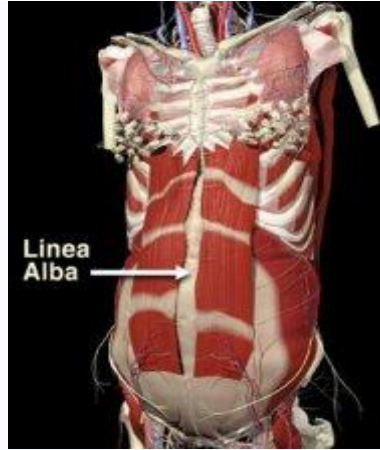


Abdominal Separation (Rectus Diastasis) Explained



Rectus Diastasis is a disorder associated with the late pregnancy and the Post Natal period. It is defined as a separation of the two lengths of the **Rectus Abdominis** muscle (commonly known as the 'six pack muscles') away from the midline fascia (or connective tissue) known as the **Linea Alba**.

The Rectus Abdominis runs from the Xiphoid Process in the upper mid chest to the Pubic bone. In Pregnant and Post Natal women, separation of the Rectus Abdominis muscles occurs as a result of the stretching and weakening of the Linea Alba as the foetus grows and appears to be more common in women who have had several pregnancies (the repeated stretching of the Rectus and Linea Alba causing increased weakness), multiple birth pregnancies and those women who appear to be carrying their babies 'out in front'. The relaxing effect of pregnancy hormones may also contribute to the weakening of the Linea Alba as these hormones affect all connective tissue.

Separation may occur anytime in the last half of pregnancy but can be exacerbated by a long labour period with accompanying pushing which creates excessive intra abdominal pressure at a time with the abdominal wall is at its weakest.

The presence of abdominal separation critically reduces the integrity and functional strength of the Core. Which usually leads to pelvic instability and back pain.

Abdominal Separation/Diastasis Recti Self-Test



This simple self-test will help you determine if you have Rectus Diastasis and the severity of it.

The Test

- Position yourself as shown above, your head resting on a cushion or pillow, your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Observe 'good abdominal care' (especially in the early Post Natal period) when getting into this position by firstly getting into a kneeling position before lying on your side and then rolling onto your back.
- You will now need to perform a mini 'shoulder lift' off the pillow or cushion while creating a contraction in the Rectus muscles. As you perform this lift, you will use your free hand to assess whether you have any separation in your abdominals.
- Firstly, place one of your hands behind your head ready to support its weight. Then take a breath in. As you exhale, draw your belly button into towards your spine and lift your shoulder blades off the pillow/cushion. Working fairly quickly - hold your index and third finger of your free hand vertically together and pass them, quite firmly, **HORIZONTALLY ACROSS THE VERTICAL OF THE LINEA ALBA AREA & THE RECTUS MUSCLES**, starting at the top of the Rectus muscles (at the Sternum/Breastbone), work your way down the midline towards the belly button and then after it – remember the Rectus muscles fasten at the pubic bone!
- Take care to observe any changes in tension as your fingers pass across the Rectus muscles to the Linea Alba and indeed whether your fingers have dipped into any gap.
- You can perform this test in several stages (performing several abdominal contractions then lifts) as you work your way down the Linea Alba to avoid sustained intra abdominal pressure in this potentially weakened area.
- **A gap where BOTH of your fingers descend is considered to be POSITIVE FOR RECTUS DIASTASIS.**

- If a gap of 2 finger widths or more is found, traditional Rectus Abdominis work **SHOULD NOT** be started until the gap is smaller than the width of two fingers (ideally, less than one) and you should be cautious when performing strenuous activity that increases pressure in the abdomen or produce gross work for the Internal and External Oblique muscles (the side abdominals).
- **In terms of exercise to aid Core Restoration, ideally, you should seek specialist advice from either your Health Care Provide, a Women’s Health Physiotherapist or a fully qualified and specialist Pre-Post Natal Fitness Professional. But Mother Nature generally has all this in hand and usually, as your Post Natal recovery progresses and you apply good abdominal care and appropriate exercise, the gap should begin to close and the integrity, density, strength and function of the Linea Alba will increase.**
- Finally, it is fairly normal for most Post Natal women to experience some degree of abdominal separation (roughly the width of a finger), but seek advice from your Health Care Professional or a fully qualified specialist Fitness Professional if you find that....

- Your gap is more than 2 finger widths
- Your gap does not reduce over a period of a few months as you begin your Core Reconditioning Programme
- You observe a ‘doming’ at your midline (usually at the upper Rectus area) as pressure increases in the abdomen. Most people see this as they are getting up from lying in the bath or getting out of bed.
- Or if you’re in any doubt at all about the strength of your Core and how to improve it.



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