

Guide to Healing Your Core & Ending 'Mummy Tummy'

Every single woman who has ever been pregnant will experience core weakness due to the changing shape and load on their body. It is extremely important that women take time and care with their bodies to heal their bodies safely, give their body time to reconnect and restore optimal function to reduce chances of injury or pain down the track.

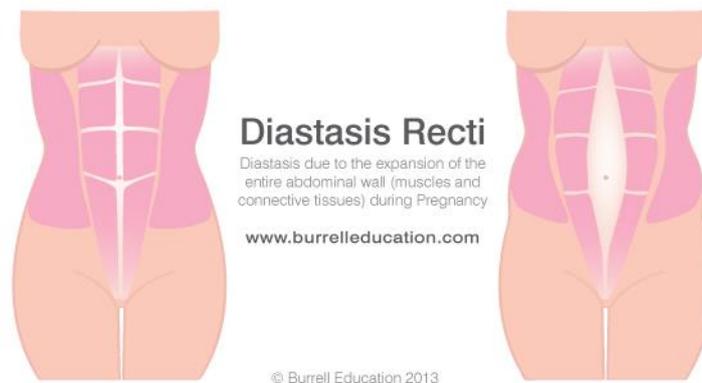
What is abdominal separation?

During pregnancy your body needs to expand to accommodate room for your growing baby. One of the amazing ways your body transforms, is the by thinning & stretching of the tissue down the medial line of your abdominals. The middle vertical line that you would have in a '6 pack'.

This is sometimes referred to as Diastasis, Diastasis of the Rectus Abdominals or DRAMS. It is very normal and very common for all pregnant women. This is NOT tearing of the muscles.

But my youngest is now in school. Surely, I don't have this?

It doesn't go back to normal straight away, so we need to modify some of our exercises and daily habits to help it heal. If it goes uncared for, it can become a larger separation, lead to other issues such as back pain, incontinence, breathing issues and general core weakness. This can still exist years after your last pregnancy!



Who is most at risk of DRAMS?

- Women who had large babies or a multiple pregnancy ie twins
- Petite women as there is less room for body to expand
- Women who had a very tight or strong core pre-pregnancy
- Anyone who is pregnant!

Should I be worried?

It is very normal. But you do need to take immediate action to aid the healing process. "Normal" is considered a gap of 2cm or less. We also want you to have functional strength. You may still have a gap, but if you know how to correctly engage your core to protect and strengthen your body during exercise and daily movements, then your core is still strong & functional.

How do I check DRAMS?

It is recommended that all women see a Women's Health Physio after child birth. They will give you the full once over, check your core, pelvic floor, posture, hips and general body health. It doesn't require lots of appointments, but they will give you simple homework to assist.

You can ask your GP, Physio or Pre/Postnatal Fitness expert to help you assess your separation. But you can also easily check it yourself.

1. Lay down on the floor, on your back, knees bent and feet just below your bottom. Touch your tummy to feel what your current 'normal' is and notice if you have any bumps or pain in your tummy
2. Look for any signs of 'doming'.
3. Place your fingers at your belly button, then lift your head and shoulders gently off the ground. Feel if you can find a ridge between your left and right side of your abdominal muscles. Measure the width & depth (in fingers).
4. Continue following the midline of your tummy up towards your sternum. Note how long (if any) the gap continues up.
5. Continue down past your belly button and note how far below your belly button the gap may travel.
6. Take note of the width (in fingers eg 1, 2, 3, 7 fingers wide), depth (how far your finger feels it drops into your tummy) and length (how far below or above the belly bottom the gap travels). Recheck and note any improvement each month.

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch video on how to test for abdominal separation.

How do you 'activate your core'?

You may have heard in 'old school' class "Suck in your Core" and you quickly squeeze your tummy as hard as you can. This method can sometimes lead to negative downward pressure going through your pelvic floor, which can weaken those muscles. The effort we put into 'activating our core' is really only around 50%.

The Core 'Cube'

Your core is like a cube/dice. It has 6 sides. For optimal function and strength, you need even tension & strength on each side. This includes your diaphragm, oblique's (side abs), Back, Abs (front) & pelvic floor. If one side is weak it can show up as symptoms on any of the other sides. Eg DRAMS can lead to back pain or continence issues.

Imagine your 'T' Zone – Do this when we say 'brace your core/pelvic floor'

You are drawing the capital T shape on your lower core. The top of the T goes across from one hip bone to the other, then the other line goes from the middle down towards your pubic bone.

Think about drawing in the outer edges of the top of the T. Like you are trying to use your muscles to squeeze and draw your hip bones together in the middle. Then lift UP from the pelvic floor to join the top of the T (zip up from bottom to top). The upward motion is of special importance.

Should I 'suck in' my core all day?

No. It is all about tension to the task. It actually is ok for your body to be relaxed and have relaxed posture for normal movement. But if are doing heavier lifting eg Weights, lifting heavy toddler, washing baskets or moving furniture, then yes you need to brace your core for these movements.

Exercises to heal your core.

Technically there are no exercises that will heal your separation faster BUT there are plenty that will slow it down and make it worse.

What we actually need to do, is rest the rectus abs (top layer) to give them a chance to heal and come closer together, while rebuilding up the deepest layer, your transversus abs.

This is why sit ups and crunches are so bad, because they work the rectus really intensely and pull on the gap, potentially making it worse. There are so many great exercises you can do for your core, so you can safely ditch crunches FOREVER. Even if you have no separation and just want to restrengthen your core, there are many more Mum functional exercises I suggest you try.

Are you doing accidental crunches? Sitting up off the floor or Sitting up in bed?
Get in the habit of rolling to the side to get up

Your Core Workout:



Side Plank

- Lay on your side with elbow underneath your shoulder. Knees bent with feet tucked behind you. Your body should make a flat line between your shoulders/hips/knees.
- On your outward breath, lift your hips off the ground to their highest point. Breathe in and lower your body back to the ground.
Complete 15 repetitions on your breathing rhythm
- Advanced option: Hold your hips at the highest point & extend your top leg straight with toe touching the floor. Breathe out, lift your top foot off the ground while maintaining hip stability, then breathe in and lower your foot back to the ground. Your hips must stay high off the ground through out all repetitions. Try 20 leg lifts each side



Hip Thrust

- Lay flat on your back with feet a hands distance away from your bottom and knees a fist distance apart
- Tuck your pelvis under slightly to flatten your back
- Breathe out and lift your hips high off the ground until you have a straight line between knees, hips & shoulders
- Breathe in and slowly return your hips to the ground
Complete 15 repetitions on your breathing rhythm
- Advance option: Hold your hips at the highest point, straight line between knee/hips/shoulders and lift your heels one at a time while keeping your hips high from the ground & steady. Try 20 heel lifts



Single Leg Raises

- Lay flat on your back. Have one leg (left) bent with foot a hands distance away from your bottom while resting the other leg (right) out straight.
- Tuck your pelvis under slightly to flatten your back
- Breathe out and lift your straight leg into the air. Breathe in and lower down.
- Only lower down until you feel your back start to loose contact with the ground. Easier option is the keep the movement smaller & higher.
- Complete 15 repetitions on each leg with your breathing rhythm



Torpedo

- Lay on your side with body long and flat while resting your head on your hand
- Pointe your toes. Breathe in and lift the top leg so that it is parallel to the ground.
- Maintain hip stability and lift your bottom foot to meet the top foot.
- Breathe out and lower both feet back to the ground together
- Rhythm should be over 4 counts – 1 (lift top leg), 2 (lift bottom leg), 3 & 4 (lower both feet to the ground over 2 counts)

Complete 15 repetitions on each side

Are there any other factors that will affect the way more core heals or responds to exercise?

I have highlight 5 key areas that will affect your journey

1. Exercise
 - Choosing the correct exercises that support your body
 - ACTION: Do the exercises outlined in this guide & swap out sit up and crunches
2. Nutrition
 - Choosing foods that nourish your body and don't have an inflammatory response (eg bloating) in your body. Sometimes foods such as dairy, gluten or other foods that your body has an intolerance can cause inflammation (such as bloating)
 - ACTION: Remove all processed foods from your diet
3. Stress
 - Motherhood is stressful. Excess stress release cortisol in your body which tells your body to store more fat. This is usually stored in your mid section
 - Find better stress management strategies, bring more calm across your day and schedule.
 - ACTION: Plan to do something every single day that is fun, makes your smile or laugh. It could be a 5min dance in the kitchen or hobby you haven't done in a while.
4. Sleep
 - Lack of sleep will alter your hormone levels and change the way your body responds to food and exercise efforts
 - ACTION: Review your bedtime routine. Set up a bedtime routine for yourself, like you would for your children & no screen time within the last 30min before bed.
5. Hormones
 - As long as your hormone levels are elevated, this will alter your bodies typical response patterns to exercise & nutrition. Breastfeeding will keep your hormones elevated for longer, but please continue to breastfeed as long as possible.
 - ACTION: Start a gratitude journal

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