



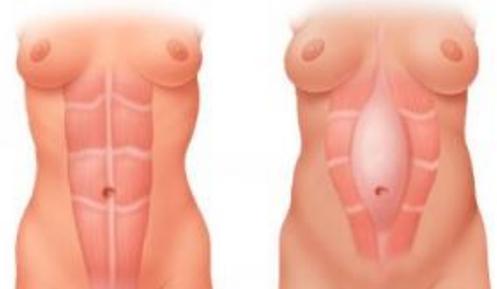
DIASTASIS OF THE RECTUS ABDOMINUS MUSCLES (DRAM)

Throughout your pregnancy, the abdominal muscles stretch to allow more room for your baby. They are able to stretch because your body produces a hormone – Relaxin – which softens the ligament that runs between to two sides of the Rectus Abdominus muscle (“Six-pack muscles” at the front of your stomach). The Relaxin hormone allows the ligament and muscles to stretch to accommodate your baby.

This stretching of the ligament (called Linea Alba) creates a separation of the abdominal muscles which you may be able to feel. This is called a Diastasis of the Rectus Abdominus (DRAM). You may notice a “peaking” or rise in the tummy, especially when you are moving from lying to sitting or doing a sit-up movement. This peaking or bulging is because the stretched ligament is not providing as much resistance as normal against the pressure created in the abdomen during those actions. Some people are more likely to notice/feel a DRAM than others.

Risk factors that increase the chances of having a DRAM are:

- Twins or triplets
- Babies with a birth weight of > 4kg
- Excessive fluid, fluid retention or excessive weight gain during pregnancy
- Genetic predisposition to stretchy ligaments (laxity)
- Short period of time between pregnancies, especially when combined with inadequate recovery after each pregnancy
- Frequent straining with heavy lifting, coughing, constipation or sit-up actions.



How do I know if I have a DRAM?

- Your physiotherapist has felt your tummy and found a separation > 2 finger-widths, and/or;
- You or your physiotherapist notice peaking of your tummy muscles while doing a sit-up action.

It is important to have your tummy muscles assessed so an appropriate treatment and management plan can be implemented for you. Ideally your muscles should be assessed whilst you are still in hospital, and 6 weeks later. Due to the stretched muscles and ligaments from pregnancy, your back is more vulnerable to injury and poor posture in the post natal period. This is compounded when you have to do lots of lifting/carrying/feeding with your newborn.

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Management of a DRAM:

1. Tubigrip / Post Natal Recovery Shorts:

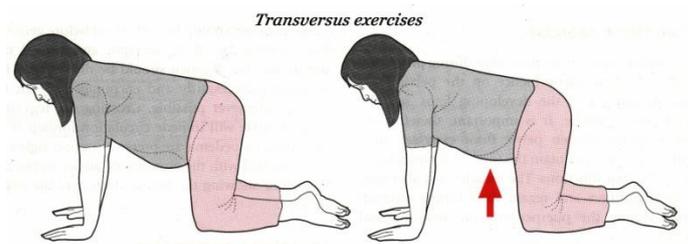
There are a couple of choices of abdominal support available. All types support your lower back and abdomen whilst you are strengthening the deep abdominal muscles in the post natal period. You should wear these during the day for 3 to 6 weeks, particularly whilst you are doing activities that require any bending or lifting, e.g. bathing/feeding/bending over your baby or toddler.

2. Minimise Lifting:

It is recommended that you do not lift anything heavier than your newborn for the first 6 weeks postnatally. Lifting increases the load on the healing muscles and ligaments that is greater than they can currently withstand, which risks further stretching these structures. Additionally, your spine is at risk of injury due to the lack of support. Ask family and friends to assist you with lifting tasks, use step-stools with toddlers to maximise their independence and break tasks down to manageable sizes.

3. Strengthen your deep tummy muscles:

The deepest layer of your tummy muscles – Transversus Abdominus (TA) – is the muscle layer that gives the most support to your spine. The stronger this muscle is, the more supported your back is, reducing the risk of injury.



To strengthen the TA muscle, start on your hands and knees. Relax all your tummy muscles. Whilst breathing normally, draw the lower part of your abdomen (between your belly-button and pubic bone) gently towards your spine and hold for 3 seconds before relaxing again. Repeat 10 times. Progress to doing 10 repetitions of 10 second holds. Aim to do this once per day.

4. Use your Pelvic Floor and Deep abdominal muscles when lifting or changing positions:

Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles and gently draw in your TA muscles just prior to lifting your baby/pram/shopping bag or when getting out of a chair, coughing, rolling in bed etc. This will engage the muscles to prevent peaking and look after your back.

5. Avoid activities that increase your peaking or DRAM:

Avoid sit-ups (roll out of bed instead), lifting heavy objects (including toddlers, where applicable) and avoid straining on the toilet/constipation.