

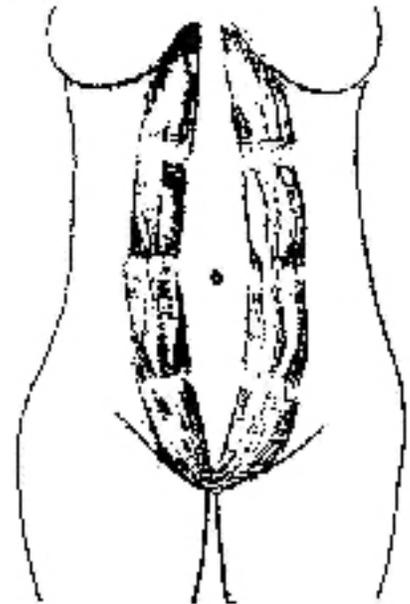
# Diastasis Rectus Abdominis (Abdominal Muscle Gap)

## What is Diastasis Rectus Abdominis (DRA)?

The rectus abdominis is a muscle that runs from your breast bone to your pubic bone. It is made up of two long bands of muscle (recti) that are joined in the middle by connective tissue.

During pregnancy, as the baby grows and needs more space, the central tissue softens and becomes stretched. This causes a gap between the muscle bands. More widening can occur during labour and delivery.

After delivery, the rectus abdominis usually returns to normal. Some wide gaps may take longer to heal and new mothers should take extra care when using these muscles.



## Do I have it?

### To check yourself:

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat

- ▶ place your fingers just above your belly button
- ▶ lift your head and shoulders off the bed and feel the cord-like edges of the muscles on either side
- ▶ If the distance between the cords is more than two finger-widths, you will need to do special exercises to help reduce the gap

- ▶ you will need to learn ways to decrease strain on your stomach muscles
- ▶ sometimes you may see a bulge in the middle between the muscles when checking yourself or when you get up from bed, rise from sitting or when lifting your baby. This bulging means there may be a gap or your muscles are not working properly.

**\* consult the physiotherapist  
 if you are not sure**

*cont'd...*

## How do I correct it?

- ▶ do your pelvic floor muscle exercises (kegels)
- ▶ every time you change position (sit, stand, turn in bed) or lift do a kegel and breathe out. Pull in your abdominal muscles at the same time
- ▶ get in and out of bed from your side

## You should avoid:

- ▶ holding your breath when lifting
- ▶ exercises that involve side-bending or twisting
- ▶ sit-ups or abdominal crunches
- ▶ lifting anything heavier than your newborn
- ▶ using a front carrier

## Other Helpful Tips:

- ▶ stand and walk tall. This will help train your muscles and protect your back
- ▶ use a pillow or two under your baby while breastfeeding and a footstool under your feet
- ▶ use a small pillow or rolled up towel behind your back when sitting to maintain the curve in your lower back.

## Am I ready to progress to crunches and higher activity?

- ▶ Be careful not to progress too quickly if you are experiencing:
  - ongoing back, pelvis, groin or abdominal pain
  - leaking urine, gas or stool with lifting, laughing, coughing, exercising or any other time
  - pressure or bulging in your vagina or rectum
  - bulging of your abdomen during any exercise or daily activities

If you notice any of the above consult a physiotherapist for a complete assessment.

## For more information please contact:

BC Women's Hospital  
Physiotherapy Department  
Phone: 604-875-2126

## *To find a physiotherapist near you:*

[www.bcphysio.org](http://www.bcphysio.org) and click on "Find a Physio"