



Abdominal Rectus Muscle Separation



During pregnancy, many women experience a separation of their stomach muscles. Known as diastasis recti, this condition occurs when the main abdominal muscle (called the abdominal rectus) begins to pull apart. The left and right sides of this muscle separate, leaving a gap in between. Separated muscles do not tear or rupture, so little pain is involved, at least initially. Instead, the muscles thin out, creating a space in the abdomen. Women who experience rapid growth of their stomachs during pregnancy are more likely to suffer from separated abdominal muscles.

How Common are Separated Muscles?

Separated muscles are actually fairly common during pregnancy. About one-third of all pregnant women experience separated muscles at some point throughout their pregnancy. Separation of the stomach muscles is more likely to occur during the second trimester or third trimester of pregnancy. However, separation also frequently occurs during labor and delivery.

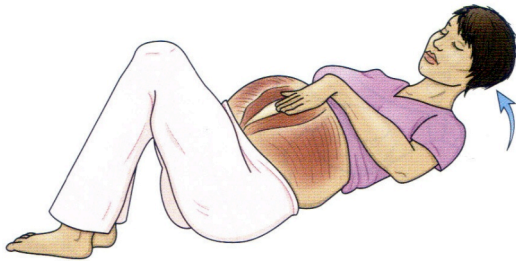
Complications Associated with Separated Muscles

If you are suffering from separated muscles during pregnancy or in the postpartum period, it is important to take steps to encourage your muscles to reattach. It is unlikely that these muscles will reattach on their own and they may actually continue to separate after you have given birth. If left untreated, separated muscles can cause health complications, including:

- Chronic lower back pain (due to the fact that the abdominal muscles help to support your back and spinal column)
- Altered posture due to weak abdominal muscles (which in turn weakens your back muscles, leading to back pain)
- Abdominal hernia

Checking for Separated Muscles in the Post-natal Period

It is very easy to determine whether you have separated abdominal muscles.



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Slowly raise your head and shoulders off the ground. This should cause your abdominal muscles to tighten.
- Place your index and middle fingers just below your belly button.
- Press into your abdomen with your fingers. You should feel a soft gap between two hard muscles.
- Measure the space of the gap using your fingers. If the gap is greater than two finger widths, you may be suffering from separated muscles.

Treating Separated Muscles

There are some easy ways to help treat separated muscles after you have given birth. Simple abdominal exercises can help to bring the left and right sides of your rectus abdominus back together. Ask your chiropractor to prescribe you some abdominal exercises suitable for your level of abdominal separation. The stomach exercises are suitable if you have undergone a caesarean section, as long as your stitches have been removed and your scars have healed.

Some Types of Movement to Avoid

- Movements where the upper body twists and the arm on that side reaches backward, such as during a tennis serve.
- Exercises that require lying backward over a large exercise ball.
- Yoga postures that stretch the abdominals, such as "cow pose," "up-dog,"
- Most traditional abdominal exercises that work the exterior abdominal muscles, such as crunches and oblique curls.

- Rising from a supine position by rolling up and twisting at the same time. Instead, roll first onto your side, and then use your arms to help push yourself up to a sitting position.
- Lifting and carrying very heavy objects.

After childbirth, if you develop a cough from allergies or a respiratory illness, such as a cold or flu, place your hands across your belly and manually splint your abdomen together during coughing episodes. This will provide needed additional support, and prevent further separation of your midline.

Signs of Midline Recovery

Abdominal separation resolves when either your muscles have pulled back together to less than two finger widths, or when you can feel that your midline has become strong and elastic, at about six months postpartum. At this point, you will no longer feel a hole in your abdomen. Once your connective tissue has regained its former density and elasticity, you are no longer at risk for hernia or other associated problems.

For Best Results, Start Reconditioning Soon after Childbirth

Starting your abdominal reconditioning soon after pregnancy will yield the best results. If you begin abdominal reconditioning at more than six months postpartum it is unlikely that you will be able to decrease the width of the gap at your midline. So if at all possible, start exercises that restore the abdominal wall in the initial months after childbirth.

www.homechiropractor.co.uk sallyscott@homechiropractor.co.uk