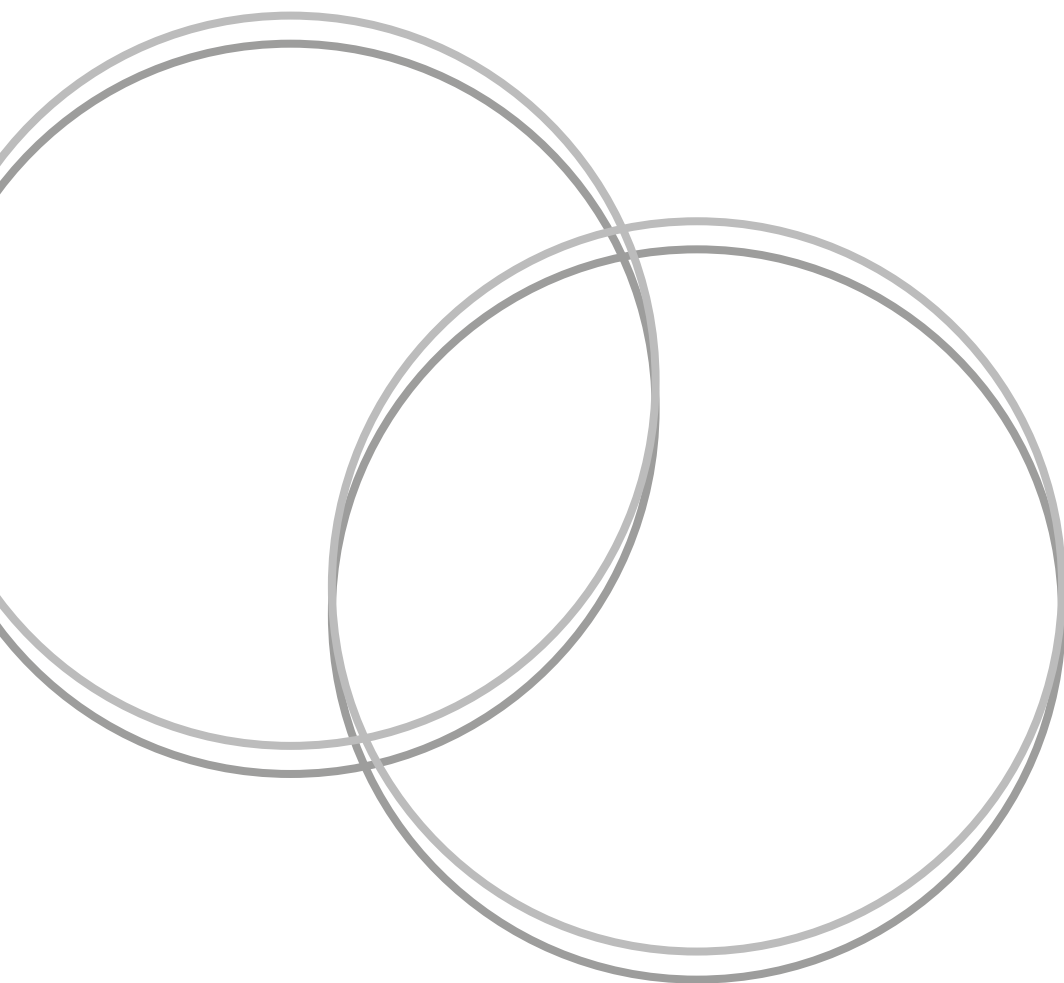




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Recti Diastasis

Information for patients

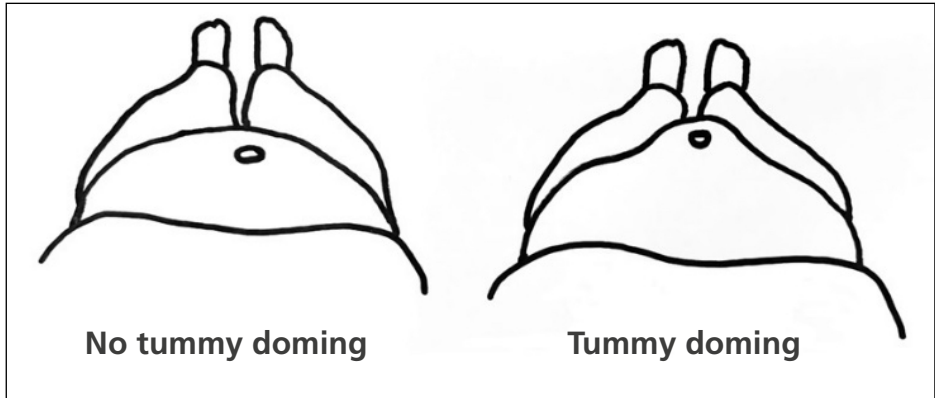


Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy

## Recti Diastasis

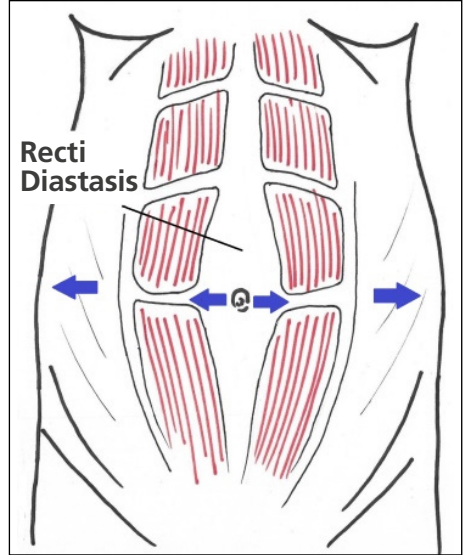
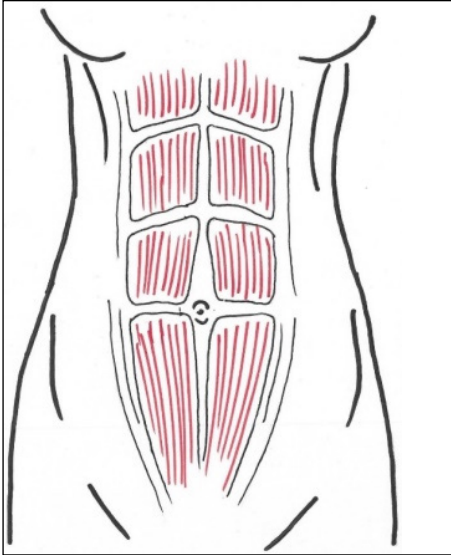
Recti diastasis occurs when the connective tissue between the 'six-pack' abdominal (tummy) muscles (rectus abdominis) softens and stretches during pregnancy. This is normal in pregnancy to allow the bump to grow. We usually expect this to improve after the birth, however, you may experience ongoing symptoms.

You may notice bulging/oming of your tummy with activities such as sitting up in bed or coughing and sneezing. You may become aware of reduced abdominal strength or control.



## How it happens

Pregnancy hormones soften connective tissue, making it more stretchy. The pictures below show how your connective tissue is stretched by a growing uterus (womb), causing recti diastasis in some people.



## **Why it is important to treat recti diastasis**

If you have recti diastasis your abdominal (tummy) muscles may be weaker.

Weak abdominal muscles can be linked to problems with back and pelvic pain, pelvic floor dysfunction, poor bowel function and reduced control or strength when completing daily tasks.

Treatment focuses on the control and strengthening of the abdominal muscles, rather than 'closing a gap' or changing appearance.

## **How does it recover?**

Often a small diastasis gets better six to eight weeks after giving birth. If it does not resolve within this time scale, you may need to see a Women's Health Physiotherapist.

There are a number of things you can do in the first six weeks to help your recovery.

## **Abdominal muscle strengthening**

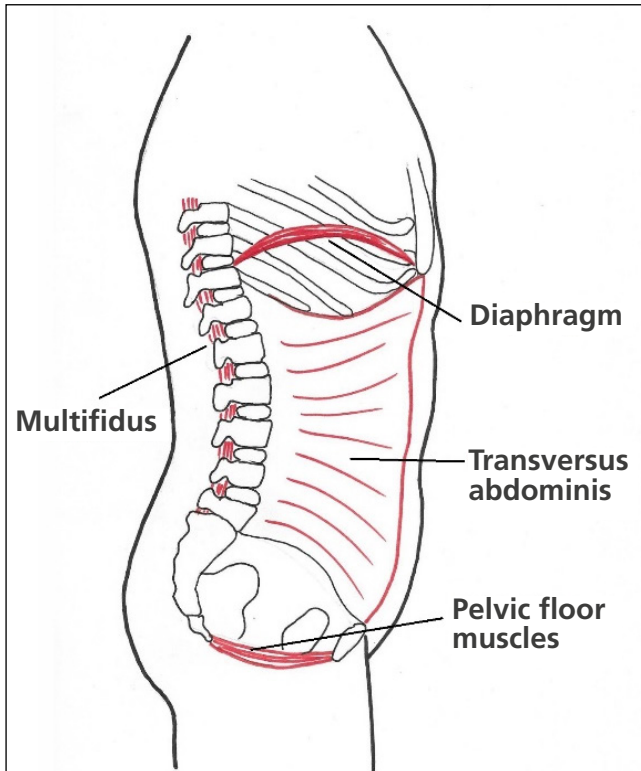
An element of abdominal weakness is normal postnatally given the stretching of these muscles throughout pregnancy. Often these muscles get stronger naturally and with some gentle strengthening exercises.

# Abdominal muscle strengthening

Your abdominal muscles can get stronger naturally with the help of some gentle strengthening exercises.

The deepest abdominal muscles are known as the 'transversus abdominis'. They work together with the other abdominal muscles and pelvic floor to support your back and maintain a good posture.

It is important to learn how to perform a basic abdominal strengthening exercise before progressing onto harder abdominal exercises.

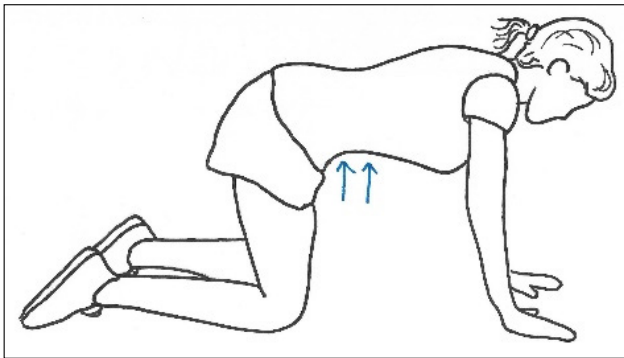


## Exercises

Start by taking a gentle breath in, allowing your tummy to rise. As you breathe out, draw in your lower tummy (below the belly button) towards your spine. Try to keep your back still while you do this.

Try to hold this activation for 5 to 10 seconds. Keep breathing normally, then relax and let go.

You can do these exercises in a variety of positions. Start lying on your back, with your knees bent and feet resting on the floor. When you feel able, you can progress to performing these in a sitting or standing position, or on hands and knees. You can also try to do them when going about your normal daily activities, such as when lifting baby, walking, and getting in and out of bed.



### When doing these exercises:

- Avoid holding your breath. Stop if you hold your breath – this means you are pulling in too hard and need to refocus and practice more gently.
- Stop if you feel a downward pressure on your pelvic floor as this means your technique may be incorrect.
- You should feel no pain or discomfort.
- If you are unsure, have your technique checked by a Women's Health Physiotherapist.

## **Progression**

Over time, the goal is to increase your deep abdominal muscle strength. There are many ways to do this in the post-natal period. The focus should be on control and avoiding any doming, as this may indicate the exercise is too challenging at present. It is often a good idea to talk about this with a Women's Health Physiotherapist as they can work out what is appropriate for you.

Below are links to our Level 1 and Level 2 core exercise videos, which may be a good place to start.

If you experience any pain or have any concerns with these exercises, please discontinue, and speak with your GP, midwife or physiotherapist.

### **Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy – Abdominal Strengthening exercises Level 1 video**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFK0xXEnv6s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFK0xXEnv6s)



### **Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy – Abdominal Strengthening exercises Level 2 video**

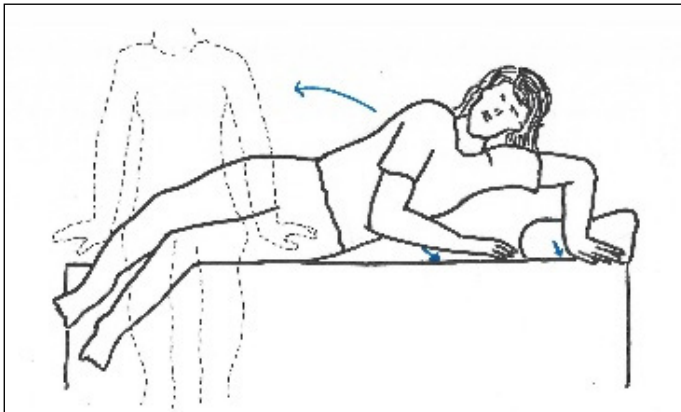
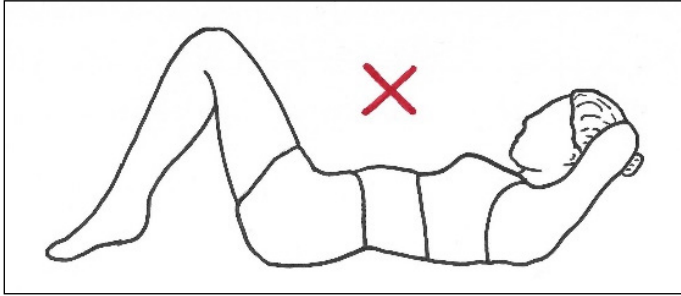
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-gv2VnDSmM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-gv2VnDSmM)



Follow the links above or scan the QR code to watch the videos.

## Avoid straining

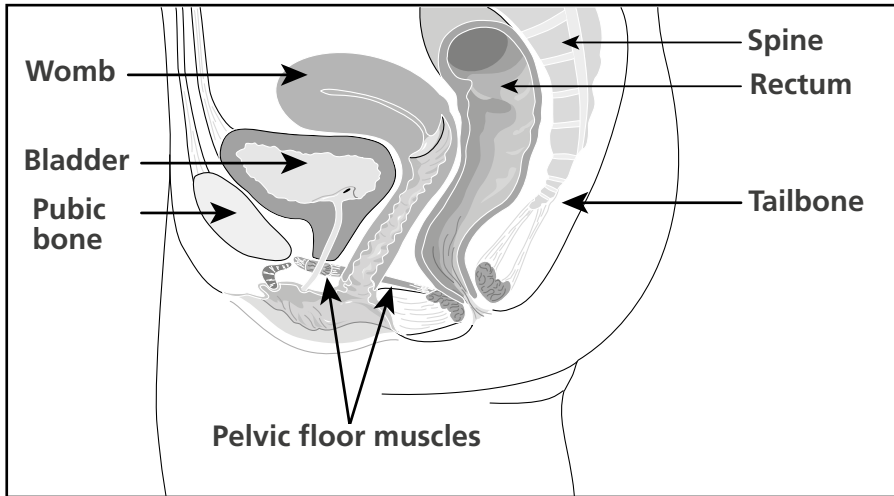
- When getting in and out of bed, avoid sitting straight up as this will generally feel weak, and this can put strain on the abdomen. Instead, roll onto your side and push up through your elbows.



- Try and avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby, as this can put added strain on your lower back.
- It is also important to avoid constipation and straining with your bowels. Please speak to your GP, midwife or physiotherapist if you need any advice about this.

## Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor sits like a hammock of muscle supporting the pelvic contents from underneath and works closely with the deep abdominal muscles.



### How to train your pelvic floor muscles

Find a comfortable position. Lying down is easiest at first.

1. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind by tightening around your back passage. Imagine trying to stop yourself passing urine by tightening the muscles around your front passage. At the same time gently draw your pelvic floor muscle up into your pelvis. Some women describe imagining they are holding onto something inside their vagina and stopping it from falling out. Keep breathing normally.
2. Aim to hold this tightening for ten seconds, then relax and let go. Repeat up to ten times. If you feel the contraction dropping off, stop, rest and start again later.
3. Next, repeat the contraction quickly but firmly. Hold for one second then relax completely. Repeat this aiming for 10 to 15 repetitions.
4. Once you can do this lying down, try sitting and then standing.

## Other sources of information

Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy – Recti Diastasis video.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqn1z8G8Uzs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqn1z8G8Uzs)



Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy pelvic floor information video.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyM\\_HmPWx2Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyM_HmPWx2Y)



Follow the links above or scan the QR code to watch the videos.

## Contact us

If you need any further information or advice after reading this leaflet, please contact the Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy Department.

Tel: **01865 235 383**

Email: **[physio.womensandmenshealth@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:physio.womensandmenshealth@ouh.nhs.uk)**

(Monday to Friday, 8.30am - 4.00pm)

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team  
April 2026  
Review: April 2029  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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