

The abdominals & diastasis recti

Structure of the Abdominals

Your abdominal muscles act as a natural corset with the fibres passing in different directions to give total support. The main muscles include: rectus abdominis, external obliques, Internal obliques and transversus abdominis.

During pregnancy the abdominal muscles are forced to stretch both widthways and lengthways. The linea alba is a fibrous tissue which runs down the middle of your rectus abdominis. As the baby grows, the linea alba is weaker, thinner and widens - causing what is known as diastasis recti. This is usually defined as a gap of 2cm (finger widths) or more, but if you have a gap wider than this, don't be alarmed - there are many more factors at play than just the gap with regards exercising.

The 'core' is made up of the lower back, pelvis and abdominals and its role in providing strength and promoting good posture without back pain cannot be underestimated. It is therefore really important to work on strengthening all these areas holistically as they are all linked.

What is advised regarding exercise?

The linea alba and abdominals can realign naturally, but can take some time and there are movements that are contraindicated in this healing process. The Mamawell postnatal programme concentrates on working the core safely to accommodate and work towards healing Diastasis Recti, but it is worth remembering that planks, crunches and weighted full-body movements are not advised.

it's not advised to stop moving, stop lifting anything, stop exercising - as how can the muscles keep any strength if we don't activate them? They need this strength and ability to activate in order to work towards better function.

Any movement that causes intra-abdominal pressure, or doming of the stomach could be detrimental to Diastasis Recti healing.

Exercises that promote realignment of the linea alba are included in every Mamawell workout and there is further description in the Core video.

Checking for Diastasis Recti

If you have access to a women's health physio or postnatal trainer it would be beneficial for them to check for Diastasis Recti for you. However, you can check at home to get a good indication using the the Mamawell postnatal programme video on the main page.

Here is an outline of the process:

1. Lie supine (on your back) with knees bent, feet flat on the floor.
2. With one hand behind your head for support raise your head and shoulders off the floor.
3. Place your fingers in your naval and work them up to the bottom of your sternum and down again, feeling if there's any gap.
4. Approx 1 x finger = 1 cm gap. Over 2cm gap and you need to be careful of doing any movements that could promote the abdominals to separate further. However, even with a gap smaller than this, or no separation, it is advised to be mindful during all core activation and weighted full body movements.

Tension: the ability to feel some activation of the muscles underneath the abdominals that have separated is a good thing. Have a little press and see. If your hand goes right and the flesh seems very soft, then it's advised to keep working on your abdominal activation. if you can feel a decent amount of tension and 'hardness' then even with a gap in the muscles you may be able to activate your core muscles and be able to support yourself within a wide range of movements.

