

## Pregnancy Abdominals & Core

The most obvious physical change throughout pregnancy is the growing abdomen. It's amazing what is happening internally to accommodate the baby, with the body doing an incredible job of adapting naturally.

### What happens to the abdominals in pregnancy?

People worry a lot about what is happening to their abdominals - and what they can do to stop them separating, 'losing' them, growing too much in the stomach etc. The body will do what it needs to do, so try to not put it at the forefront of your mind.

Physiologically, as the bump grows, the skin stretches and the abdominal muscles which are at the front of the body separate to accommodate the growing baby. These muscles are called the rectus abdominis and they separate at the linea alba, which is a length of fibrous tissue which runs down the centre of these muscles and your abdomen. In pregnancy we often see this line as a bit darker running down the abdomen. All women will have their abdominals separate by full term pregnancy. This isn't an indication that diastasis recti (abdominal separation) will be present for long post birth.

A lot of women experience these muscles knitting back together naturally on their own, in weeks or months post birth. Other women may require a little more rehab and time, but there are lots of exercises that can be done post birth.

If you get abdominal separation during pregnancy, or already have it from previous pregnancies, you can still exercise. Just be aware of movements that might exacerbate the gap, pushing the tissue out. Exercising may really help in strengthening and controlling these muscles as well as strengthening the supporting muscles around the core.

## How does the core provide support?

During pregnancy our abdominals have an important role in supporting the torso, in conjunction with the lower back and pelvis. You will be carrying lots of extra weight in this area due to the growing abdomen, so working this 'core' part of our body effectively can be really helpful in supporting posture, reducing back and pelvic pain.

Although crunches and moves that create a lot of pressure like planks are not advised in pregnancy, there are so many safe and effective focused abdominal exercises you can do - and other ways the core can activate in full body movements. Be mindful of 'doming' - which presents as the middle of the stomach pushing out at a point. It can be observed in certain movements - and in this case, try and focus on engagement of the abdomen before instigating the movement.

If you feel you can't activate the abdominal muscles at all in certain movements, and see doming, then you might want to follow one of the adaptations given in the Mamawell programme. Watch explanatory video and core exercises specific video for information and inspiration on how to keep the core area strong and supportive through your pregnancy. They can be found on the main page of the programme.