



# **STAGE 1: Exercises for Your Tummy Muscles Service User Information Leaflet**

Produced by: Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Service

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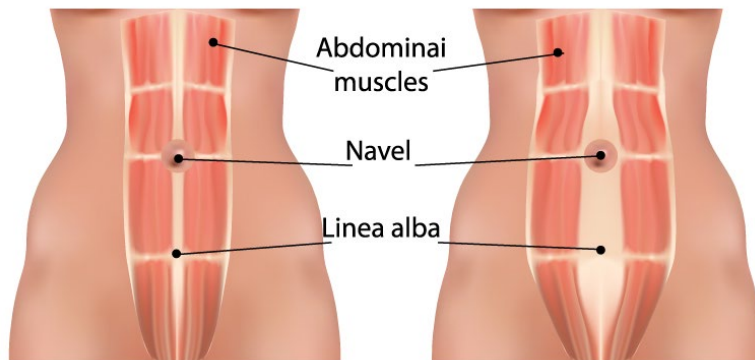
## What is Diastasis Recti Abdominus (DRA)?

Your main tummy muscle is called the Rectus Abdominus (Also known as your “six pack” muscle). This muscle has a left and a right side, joined together by a thin band of tissue. DRA is the stretching of the band of tissue and widening of the area between the left and right sides of your tummy muscle during pregnancy.

## DRA & Pregnancy

Women’s bodies have been designed to expand to allow your baby space to grow. Your tummy muscles become stretched out during pregnancy because of your expanding uterus and growing baby. Studies have shown that 100% of woman will have stretching and widening of their tummy muscle during pregnancy. The degree of widening may vary from person to person, but treatment can be very similar!

## What Does it Look like?



## Additional Resources

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/support-and-services/your-post-pregnancy-body/>  
<https://pogp.csp.org.uk/publications/pelvic-floor-muscle-exercises-women>

## References

THABET, A., ALSHERHRI, M., 2019. Efficacy of deep core stability exercise program in postpartum women with diastasis recti abdominis: a randomised controlled trial. *Journal of Musculoskeletal and Neuronal Interactions*, vol. 19, pp. 62-68.

LEOPOLD, M., SANTIAGO, K., CHENG, J., KELLER, L., ABUTALIB, Z., BONDER, J., SHARMA, G., TENFORDE, A., CASEY, E., 2021. Efficacy of a Core Strengthening Program for Diastasis Rectus Abdominis in Postpartum Woman: A Prospective Observational Study. *Journal of Woman’s Health Physical Therapy*, pp. 147-163.

## EXERCISE PROGRAM

### Stage 1: STRENGTHENING YOUR DEEP TUMMY MUSCLES



#### Diaphragmatic Breathing

Lie on your back, with your hand on your tummy.  
Breathe in through your nose towards your hands so that your belly rounds like a balloon. Breathe out through your nose so that 'the balloon deflates'.  
Focus on breathing 'into your belly' instead of upper chest.

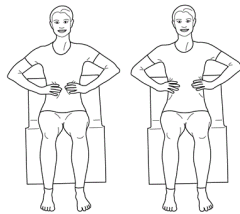
Practice for 5 mins 1-4 times per day



#### Deep Core Squeezes

Lie on your back with your hips and knees bent.  
Tighten your tummy muscles by bringing your belly button towards your spine.  
Hold for 3-5 seconds as you exhale and relax as you inhale.

3 sets of 10 reps 3-4 times per week

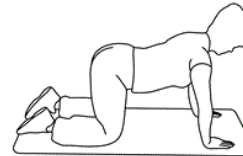


#### Lateral Breathing

Sit towards the front of your chair with feet flat on the floor. Place your hands on the sides of your ribs.

Breathe in through your nose towards your hands. Feel your lower chest expanding outward.  
Breathe out through your nose. Feel your hands lowering.

Practice for 5 mins 1-4 times per day



#### In Quadruped

Start on your hands and knees.  
Shoulders rolled back away from your ears with your back flat.  
Tighten your tummy muscles. While holding the first contraction, perform a second, feeling your tummy draw in closer to your spine. Hold for 1-2 seconds then relax.

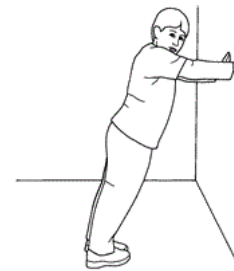
3 sets of 10 reps 3-4 times per week



#### Cat Cow

Start on your hands and knees.  
Round your back up like a cat. Hold for 3-5 seconds.  
Return so your back is flat (not arched).

3 sets of 10 reps 3-4 times per week



#### In Wall Plank

Place your hands flat on the wall with elbows straight inline with your shoulders. Position your body on a slight angle.  
Tighten your tummy muscles. While holding the first contraction, perform a second, feeling your tummy draw in closer to your spine. Hold for 1-2 seconds then relax.

3 sets of 10 reps 3-4 times per week

#### Core Compressions

## Pelvic Floor Exercises

Lie on your back or on your side with knees bent and relax your back, buttocks, legs, and abdomen.

Start from the back by tightening the muscles around your rectum and continue by tightening the muscles around your vagina and urethra as if trying to stop yourself passing urine. It should feel as if something is lifting upwards inside your pelvis. Breathe calmly.

### Long Squeezes

- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles for 5- 10 seconds.
- Relax for 3-5 seconds.
- Repeat the contract/relax cycle up to 10 times

### Short Squeezes

- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles for 2 seconds and relax for 2 seconds.
- Repeat the contract/relax cycle up to 10 times



### Why are Pelvic Floor Exercises Important?

Your tummy muscles work alongside the pelvic floor muscles. When your tummy muscles become stretched out, they don't work as well with your pelvic floor muscles and can lead to pelvic floor dysfunction or urinary incontinence.

## Why does DRA matter?

You might be asking yourself if DRA is a normal part of pregnancy, why does it matter? Your tummy muscles play an important role in supporting your body during movement (ex. sitting, standing, getting in/out of bed); and holding organs in place. DRA leads to weakness of your tummy muscles which can cause things like loss of coordination, low back pain, and pelvic girdle pain.

## How can Exercise help?

DRA is treated through targeted exercises that help to maintain and optimize strength and function of your tummy muscles during your postpartum recovery. The goal of exercise is NOT to close the gap, but to create good tension over your tummy to get stronger.