

Abdominal muscle separation with pregnancy – Diastasis Rectus Gap

In some cases, the abdominal muscles during pregnancy will painlessly stretch apart to allow for more expansion room. Occasionally this may be associated with some tenderness and a positioning of the muscles on either side of the mid abdominal line. In between these muscles is connective tissue (Fascia) that has now become increasingly stretched. This stretched area is commonly known as the Diastasis Rectus (DR) gap and is the area of skin that may form a Tent or Dome like shape when you roll over or sit up. Tenting and Doming must be minimized as soon after birth as possible, so as to reduce the risk of back pain and possible herniation of abdominal organs.



Tenting and Doming of the Abdominal wall (large Abdominal Wall Doming)

Checking for a Separation – DR Gap

In many cases the abdominal wall may not be as stretched as in the above picture, and you may feel or see it under your clothing. If not, it is best to expose the abdominal area and then check for Doming or Tenting. Follow the following steps 1-7:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, no pillow under your head. Watch your abdominal area to see if there is any Tenting, Doming or even a ridge developing along the mid-line abdominal area.



2. Place two fingers horizontally across the midline of your abdomen, approximately 2.5 cm (1 inch) above your belly button and gently press down with your fingers approximately 2cm.



Assessing above the belly button with head support (optional)



Assessing below the belly button without head support (optional)

3. Raise your head and shoulders slightly off the floor and feel for the DR separation with your fingertips. You will feel the abdominal walls come together to grip either side of your fingertips. This will give an indication of the width of your DR gap.
4. Repeat this at the belly button – the gap maybe wider here and will always be deepest due to the lack of abdominal muscle in the belly button area. The umbilical stalk.
5. Finally repeat the same 4cm below the belly button.
6. Record the width of the DR gap at all 3 check points.
7. Repeat in 2- 4 weeks after doing controlled exercises preferably given to you by your women's health physiotherapist

Important points to remember in the first post-partum 3 months:

1. Make it a priority to avoid the abdominal Tenting / Doming as much as possible. By supporting your abdomen with any coughing, sneezing, and even laughing.
2. Exhale as your go to sit to stand or with any initial lifting of a load (baby)
3. Wear an abdominal support (tube - grip or an elasticated brace, supported gym pants) during the day as much as possible. If you have back pain - you may need a back brace as well.

Seek advice from your Women's Health Physiotherapist to further support and strengthen your abdominal muscles.