

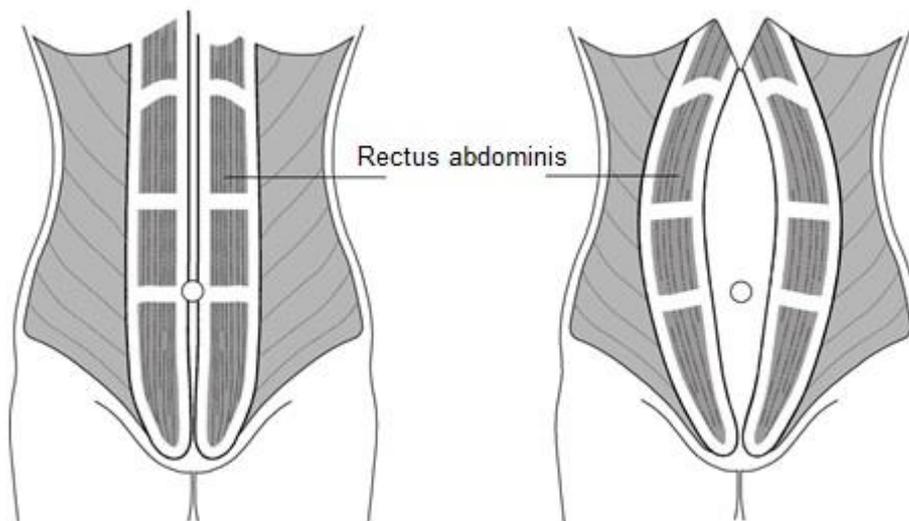
Rectus Abdominis Diastasis

This leaflet offers more information about rectus abdominis diastasis (RAD). If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your physiotherapist.

RAD is a common occurrence in pregnant and post natal women. It normally resolves within eight weeks post natally without any intervention.

What is RAD and why have I got it?

The stomach muscle is made up of four layers of muscle. The top layer of muscle is called the **rectus abdominis**. This muscle runs from the bottom of the ribcage down to the pubic bone of the pelvis. The muscle is in two halves which are joined together in the middle by connective tissue called the linea alba. During pregnancy or labour these two halves can move further apart and the linea alba can stretch as in the picture below.



It is caused by the abdomen stretching to accommodate the growing baby, along with hormonal and postural changes during pregnancy. It may also be caused during labour by actively pushing to deliver your baby. Around half of women will experience RAD following pregnancy. You are at slightly more risk if:

- You are carrying a large baby.
- You are carrying more than one baby e.g. twins.
- You have a narrow pelvis.
- You have weak stomach muscles.
- You have poor posture.
- You have had children before.

Occasionally it may occur for no apparent reason.

What are the signs and symptoms?

You may see a gap or indentation in the middle of your stomach or feel your stomach stretching. Some people with RAD experience low back pain. You may see your stomach dome if you sit up from lying.

What treatments are available?

The most effective treatment for RAD is specific exercise focused on re-educating and strengthening the deepest stomach muscle, transversus abdominis. The following exercise can be started immediately after delivery.

1) Abdominal drawing in

Lying on your back with your knees bent. Gently tilt your pelvis backwards, pressing your lower back into the floor, then gently arch your back away from the floor. Find a half-way point between these two positions; this is your “neutral spine”.



Now, keeping your pelvis in this position, gently draw your lower stomach muscles in towards your spine. Try to make this a gentle drawing in and ensure you are breathing throughout the exercise. Hold for up to 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

The following exercises can be started from six weeks post-delivery:

2) One leg stretch

Lying on your back with your knees bent. Find your neutral spine and engage your lower stomach muscles (as in the exercise above).



Gently slide your heel away from you, straightening your leg, maintaining your neutral spine position. Slide your heel back to the start position. Repeat with the other leg.

Repeat 10 times with each leg.

3) Prone drawing in

Kneel on your hands and knees. Find your neutral spine (your back should be in a flat position). Gently draw your lower stomach muscles in towards your spine (as in exercise 1). Hold for 10 seconds. Remember to breathe throughout. Repeat 10 times.



Following your assessment your physiotherapist may give you more exercises.

Can I wear a support?

Occasionally your physiotherapist may recommend you wear an external support around your stomach and low back. This double-layered elasticated material provides some gentle support to your stomach muscles and may also stimulate and encourage your deeper stomach muscles to work as you go about your day-to-day activities. This support is not always recommended. In some cases it can impede the rehabilitation process. Always follow the advice given to you by your physiotherapist.

What happens if I do not get treatment?

Some natural recovery of RAD occurs in the first eight weeks following delivery. Following this your recovery may level off without treatment. Your GP or midwife can refer you to a physiotherapist for assessment and treatment.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

It is very important to protect the stomach muscles from further strain whilst you are recovering. You should avoid doing sit-up exercises and avoid any heavy physical work or exercise. Take care when getting in and out of bed – you should bend your knees, roll onto your side and use your arms to push yourself up.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about RAD, please contact the Women's Health Physiotherapy team on 020 8725 1333 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm). Out of hours, please leave a message on this number and we will contact you as soon as we can.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

