

**“Treating Diastasis rectus abdominis: overcoming discomfort, weakness, and changes to postural control through postural training, stretching, bracing, and education”**

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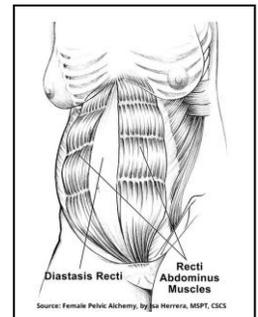
**Diastasis rectus abdominis (DRA)** is a condition in which the 2 sides of the rectus abdominis separate when the linea alba (the connective tissue between the right and left sides of the muscle) weakens and separates as the uterus grows. This typically happens in women during the second and third trimesters.

**A woman with DRA may experience any number of the following symptoms:** A visible and palpable separation of the rectus abdominis muscle. Feelings of “flabbiness” in the abdominal muscles. Pelvic-floor muscle dysfunction that causes urinary or bowel problems (incontinence, leakage, constipation, etc). Low back or pelvic or hip pain. Poor posture. Feeling weak through the midsection. Sexual pain.

**Can DRA be prevented?** Unfortunately, DRA is a natural consequence of pregnancy and can’t be prevented entirely. However, for women who are in the early stages of their pregnancies, studies have shown that starting a core and pelvic-floor muscle stabilization program is highly effective in improving function, both during and after pregnancy

**Treatment of DRA:** The best treatment utilizes a holistic full body approach that includes the pelvic floor muscles. A few simple guidelines can help you conquer your DRA in a safe manner and promote long term success.

1. Train your transverse abdominal muscle. This muscle helps keep a DRA closed and provides functionality. When training this key abdominal muscle also perform a low level kegel at 30% effort. Perform this combo exercise in different positions such as all fours, in planks, etc.
2. Don't hold your breath because that will compromise the linea alba which is the connective tissue that holds the recti abdominal muscles together and it negatively affects the pelvic floor muscles. Practice diaphragmatic breathing (ribcage should expand).
3. Don't forcefully pull in your abdominal muscles (which can actually cause organs to prolapse into your vagina because a forceful inward pull creates a downward piston effect on your organs and pushes them out of place and into your pelvic floor).
4. You may benefit from a customized pelvic health program that includes Kegels and reverse Kegels. Depending on your symptoms, this will determine whether you should pursue Kegels or Reverse Kegels or a combination of both (which is most likely).
5. Massage your abdominals to release restrictions and any trigger points you find in these muscles. These restrictions are keeping your your DRA from healing.
6. If you have had a caesarian, you must address the scar tissue as well. Many women have scar tissue that prevents a DRA from closing. Seek help from a trained physical therapist if needed.
7. Avoid traditional crunches, which make a DRA wider. Instead use a more functional approach to training your core.
8. Posture control is very important with DRA healing, so avoid slump sitting and forward head posture. Make sure to align your pelvic bones. Pay close attention to your standing posture as well. Avoid unsupported forward flexion such as sun salutes in yoga, which will widen your DRA.
9. Don't jack-knife out of bed. Instead log roll to maintain a closed DRA. To log roll turn to your side from a laying down and then sit up from that position.
10. Use a belly splint in the postpartum period and wear it slightly below the pubic bone to support your uterus and bladder. A splint helps to bring awareness to the way you are using or not your abdominals with everyday activities. Splints also help support the abdominals after abdominals surgeries and it's a good idea to utilize them.
11. Don't forget that nutrition also matters when healing in the post-partum period. Many have had good success with bone broth and putting collagen powder in smoothies.





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## What is a Reverse Kegel?

A reverse Kegel is an extending exercise that teaches you how to relax the PC and pelvic floor muscles. Both men and women can perform the exercise, although they will yield different benefits.

Unsure of what your PC muscle is? Kegel exercises are designed for strengthening of the PC (pubococcygeus) muscle. The PC muscle is a hammock-like muscle that is found in both women and men. It stretches from the pubic bone to the tailbone. The PC muscle provides a support system for all of the pelvic organs. It also controls urine flow. Many people use the term 'PC muscle' interchangeably with 'pelvic floor muscles'. In actuality, the PC muscle is a separate, unique muscle. When it has been trained correctly, it will leave you feeling strong and empowered.

Once you have learned to isolate and strengthen your PC muscle, the next step is figuring out how to control that strength and relax that muscle. Many of us carry tension in our bodies without even realizing it, so relaxation sometimes takes work. Even so, traditional Kegels can make it easier to perform reverse Kegels. The stronger your muscles, the more control you'll have when it comes time to relax.

## How Can a Physical Therapist Help?

Physical therapy is a very effective way to manage symptoms and improve functional capacity when DRA is diagnosed. Your physical therapist may help you with:

**Postural Training.** Improving postural control is one of the most important components of treatment for women who are dealing with DRA. Your physical therapist will help you learn how to stabilize your core, without overuse of the rectus abdominus muscle. This will involve training your other core muscles, such as your transverse abdominus (a deep abdominal muscle), and your pelvic floor muscles. Your physical therapist will show you how to perform daily activities, such as lifting and carrying your baby, while using proper posture.

**Stretching.** When certain muscles become weak and overstretched, other muscles may become overactive and tight. Your physical therapist will help you learn which of your muscles needs to be gently stretched to improve your strength and posture.

**Bracing.** Sometimes taping or bracing of the low back and abdominal region can provide soothing external support for women with DRA in the early phases of rehabilitation. It can also help teach you the proper position for your midsection, as it provides support and decreases any pain you may be feeling. It is recommended to wear the brace for 3 weeks after birth, but beyond that, you must engage in core retraining exercises.

**Education.** There are factors that you may not even know about relating to your pain or movement challenges that your physical therapist can help resolve. Your physical therapist can help you understand the movements or activities that are best to avoid, as you recover from DRA. (For example, women suffering from DRA should not perform traditional sit-ups or crunches.) Your physical therapist will be able to teach you safe and effective ways to regain your full function. Many women work with a physical therapist during their pregnancy to learn safe and effective exercise strategies that improve their pregnancy, labor, delivery, and postpartum experiences. If you do develop DRA, the earlier you see a physical therapist, the faster you will be on the road to less pain and improved function!

*We offer free screenings and would be happy to assess your unique body and symptoms! We also offer highly specialized manual therapy and sports medicine. Our goal is to help all of you Mommas out there stay strong and healthy so that you can enjoy motherhood and live a vibrant life! **Call today to schedule: 818-318-2430***