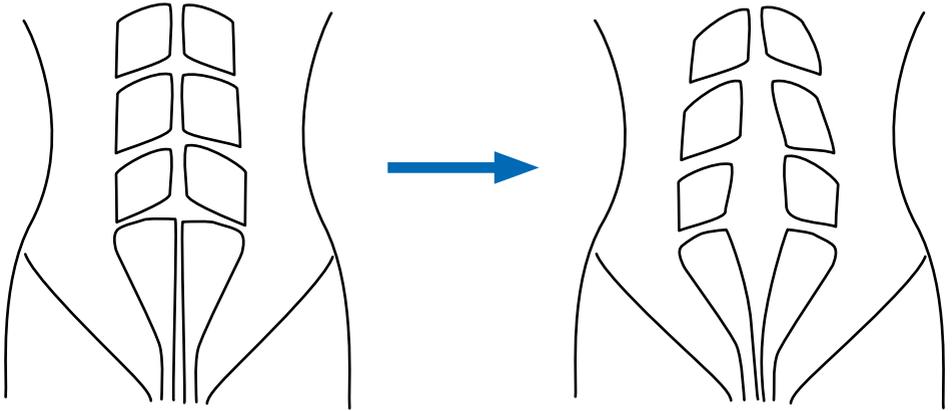


# Advice and exercises for women with Divarication of Rectus muscles – ante and post natal

Physiotherapy Department



Patient information leaflet



## **The Rectus Abdominus Muscle**

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The top layer of the abdominal muscles is called the Rectus Abdominus or “six pack” muscle which runs from the rib cage to the pubic bone. It is made up of two parallel muscles joined together by connective tissue/fascia called the linea alba.

## **What is Divarication of Recti (DVR)?**

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Divarication of Recti occurs when the two Rectus Abdominus muscles stretch apart during pregnancy as your bump grows. This is a normal occurrence during pregnancy and occurs in approximately 60-80% of pregnancies.

## **How does it happen?**

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During pregnancy hormones soften the connective tissue making it easier to stretch as the baby grows.

## **Factors contributing to DVR:**

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- Large baby (8lb plus)
- Multiple births
- Well defined abdominals
- Position of baby
- Small framed women

## Why should we treat it?

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- To reduce the risk of developing a hernia postnatally
- To help protect your back and reduce the risk of back injuries
- To help reduce the risk of pelvic pain occurring in subsequent pregnancies
- To help improve your posture and physique

## Antenatal advice

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Support abdomen with hands when:

- Rolling in bed
- Standing up from a chair
- Coughing/sneezing
- On opening bowels

Continue with pelvic floor exercises.

Contract the lower abdominals (see Trans Abs activation exercise on page 4) during transfers i.e. getting up from chair or bed.

## Postnatal advice

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Avoid twisting movements when carrying a load.

Avoid sit ups (get out of bed by rolling onto your side first).

Try to avoid heavy lifting where possible, where you do have to lift keep your back straight and bend your knees.

Good back care is essential during:

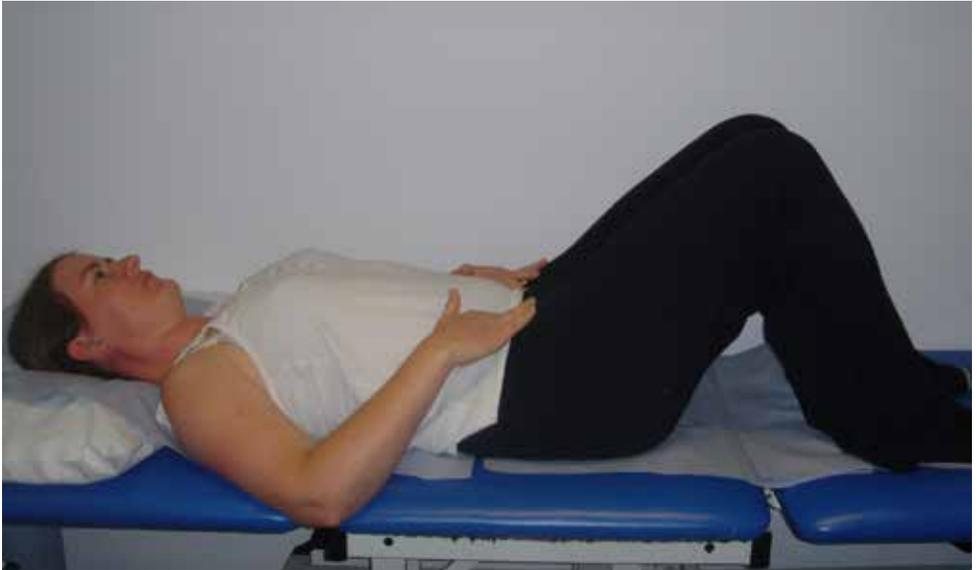
- Nappy changing
- Lifting car seats
- Lifting baby/toddler
- Household chores

Some women find support briefs, Lycra leggings or a maternity corset can help them feel more supported.

## Exercises to help with DVR once you have had your baby

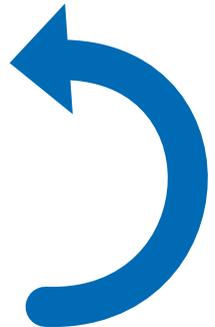
### **Abdominal exercises (Transversus Abdominis):**

1. Lie down on back with knees bent up.
2. Gently draw your lower abdomen (just below the belly button) in towards your spine.
3. Try holding this contraction for 10 seconds.
4. Make sure you are not holding your breath or sucking in your whole tummy.



## **Pelvic tilting:**

1. Lying on back with knees bent and feet on the floor/bed.
2. Contract your Trans Abs (lower abdominal muscles) and keep this contracted during the exercise.
3. Slowly flatten the small of your back onto the bed so that there is a small movement at your pelvis.
4. Hold for 10 seconds and then relax.



### **Static Recti exercise:**

1. Lying on your back with knees bent and feet on the floor/bed and arms down by your side.
2. Contract your Trans Abs and keep this contracted during the exercise.
3. Then push your arms down into the bed/floor and feel the other abdominals contract.
4. Hold 10 seconds and then relax.



## Flaps exercise:

1. Lying on your back with knees bent up and feet on the floor/bed and arms down by side.
2. Contract your Trans Abs and keep contracted during the exercise.
3. Lift arms 1-2 inches off the floor/bed.
4. Rhythmically pulse your arms up and down a few inches for 20 seconds.
5. DO NOT lift the feet off the floor/bed.



## References

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- THORNTON, SL; THORNTON, SJ (1993) Management of Gross Divarication of the Recti Abdominus in Pregnancy and Labour. *Physiotherapy* 79(7), 457-458.
- POLDEN, M; MANTLE, J (1990) *Physiotherapy in Obstetrics & Gynaecology*. Butterworth-Heinemann Oxford.
- BOISSONNAULT, JS; KOTARINOS, RK (1988) Diastasis Recti. *Obstetric & Gynaecologic Physical Therapy* New York 63-82.

## Contact details

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For Further information please contact the Physiotherapy Department

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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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