

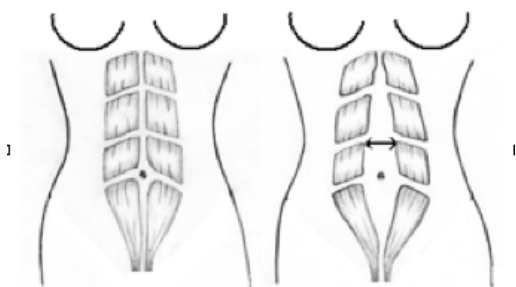
## Postnatal Exercise Progression

Start the following exercises when you feel ready to progress from the exercises on the handout called 'immediate postpartum exercises'.

If you are experiencing back/pelvic pain or problems with bladder/bowel control talk to your Doctor or Physiotherapist.

### Diastasis Rectus Abdominis Muscle

During pregnancy the two outermost abdominal muscles (Rectus abdominis) naturally stretch and curve around your growing baby. The connective tissue (linea alba) joining the two muscles in the middle stretches forming a gap between the two muscles called a Diastasis of Rectus Abdominis (DRAM). This gap is usually 5cm or three finger widths wide and it gradually closes after delivery. By 4 weeks postnatal, there should be no separation. DRAM can be associated with bulging and doming of the abdominal muscles. If you have bulging or doming or you have a DRAM of more than 2 fingers, you should not do any exercises that bring you into a "crunch" position or 2 legs in the air at once, until that settles down. Wearing good support over your tummy and doing your other core exercises, with your pelvis held steady will help it to settle in most cases.



### How to Check for DRAM

Lie on your back, knees bent, arms by your side  
Place the fingers of one hand at your belly button  
Roll your upper body off the floor, shoulder blades lift from the floor and rib cage moves towards pelvis  
Measure the number of fingers that sink past the 1st joint into the gap between the two muscles at the 3 following places a) at your belly button b) 4 finger widths above your belly button c) 4 finger widths below your belly button.

Checking for DRAM -



### Abdominal exercises

Start all the following abdominal exercises, lying with your head on a pillow, knees bent and shoulder width apart and arms by your side.

Keep your pelvis neutral (check the position with the heel of your hands on the hip bone, fingers pressed into pubic bone, the hands should be level, your back should be neither flattened into, or arched away from the mat). Breathe in allow your tummy to rise. Breathe out and gently tighten your deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles (core muscles).

Continue to breathe normally as you exercise.

#### 1. Bent knee fall out

Slowly let one knee fall out to the side  
Slowly bring the knee back to start position  
Keep your pelvis steady throughout the exercise  
Repeat 10 times alternating between sides.



#### 2. Heel Slides

Slowly slide one heel out  
Slowly slide it back to the start position  
Keep your pelvis still throughout the exercise  
Do 10 times alternating between legs



When you can manage to do both of these, then combine them together, letting the knee fall out, sliding the leg away and then returning the leg back to the starting position

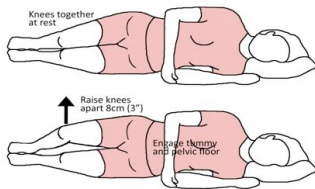
#### 3. Single leg lifts

Keep your pelvis neutral, and bend one leg up until your hip and knee is flexed to 90 degrees. Hold it and then lower down slowly with control. Repeat 5 times and do the other leg. Don't allow your pelvis to move at all.

When you have mastered this, progress to bringing both legs up, one at a time, and lowering one at a time. Don't allow your tummy to bulge or your pelvis to move.

#### 4. Clam

Lie on your side with your knees and hips bent. Shoulders, hips and ankles should be in a straight line. Engage your core muscles to stabilize your pelvis and lift your top knee away from your bottom knee as far as is comfortable. Keep your ankles touching and do not let your pelvis roll backwards. Return to the starting position slowly. Repeat 5 times each side



#### 5. Leg kicks.

Lying on your side, as above, straighten out your top leg. Keeping your pelvis steady, gently kick your leg forwards and then bring it back in line with your pelvis. Repeat 10 times.

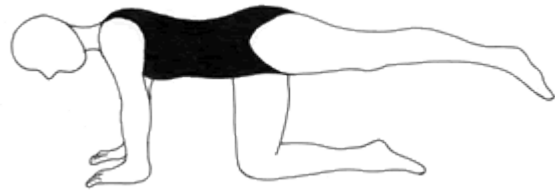
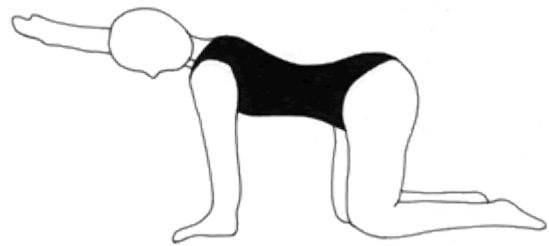
You can also lift the leg straight up and down and do small circles to further challenge the muscles.

#### 6. 4 point kneeling

On your hands and knees, hands under shoulders and knees under hips, face parallel with floor. Check yourself in the mirror to see if your spine is neutral, straight line from base of head to tailbone, with a gentle curve downwards in your lower back. Hold this position, with your core gently engaged and breathe normally.



When you can hold this position comfortably, start to slide one leg away behind you and return to starting position. Don't allow your hips to shift from side to side. When you can slide without changing your hip or spine positions, then you can start working on lifting an arm, then lifting a leg, then lifting opposite arm and leg. Do not allow your hips to shift, your back to sink or your core muscles to let go. It may take weeks or months to get to this point.



#### 7. Head lift

Breathe in to prepare. Breathe out through pursed lips as you slowly lift your head and shoulder blades away from the floor, bringing your ribs forward towards your pelvis. Keep your pelvis neutral and your core engaged. Breathe in and hold your position. Breathe out as you lower slowly back to the start.

If your tummy bulges outwards, or if your diastasis is 2 fingers or greater, you are not ready for this exercise yet.

Repeat 5 to 10 times.

