

Postnatal Exercise Progression

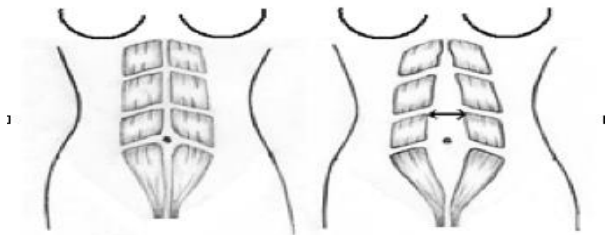
If you are experiencing back/pelvic pain that is not improving with these exercises, see your Dr or local chartered physiotherapist - www.iscp.ie.

If you are concerned about DRAM, see a women's health physiotherapist for advice

If you have bladder or bowel control issues, prolapse symptoms or pain with sex, contact physiotherapy@rotunda.ie before your baby is 6 months old.

DRAM 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 and forms a gap between the two muscles (DRAM). This gap is usually 5cm or 2-3 finger widths wide and it often gradually closes after delivery. Wearing good support over your tummy and gradually regaining your core strength will help it to improve in most cases.



How to Check for DRAM

Lie on your back, knees bent, arms by your side.

Place 2 fingers across your tummy just above the belly button and do a small slow curl up.

Measure the number of fingers that sink past the 1st joint of your fingers 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. Notice if the gap feels shallow or deep, and if there is bulging out of the gap as you lift your head.

Have a look at our video on the website to see how to do this if you aren't sure. As you strengthen your tummy, this gap usually improves by getting shallower or less wide, although not always. You can still become stronger even if the gap persists.

August 2024



Abdominal exercises

Start all the following abdominal exercises, lying with your head on a pillow, knees bent and shoulder width apart and hands resting on your lower tummy. 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 nor arched away from the mat). Breathe in, allow your tummy to rise. Breathe out and gently tighten your lower abdominal and pelvic floor muscles (core muscles).

Continue to breathe normally as you exercise, gently engaging your core on each exhale.

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

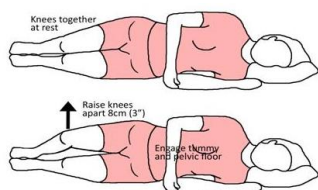
3. Single leg lifts

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. You can add in a head lift to make it more challenging.

If you have bulging of your DRAM while exercising, delay doing exercises that bring you into a "crunch" position or 2 legs in the air at once, until your deep tummy muscle control improves and you can do the exercise without bulging the tummy out or feeling pressure down into your pelvic floor.

4. Clam

Lie on your side with your knees and hips bent. Shoulders, hips and ankles should be in a straight line. Lengthen your top hip away from your ribs. Inhale and then exhale as you 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



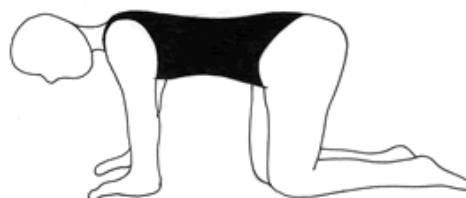
5. Leg kicks.

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.

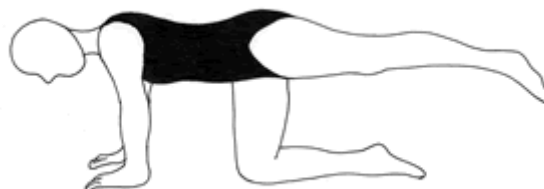
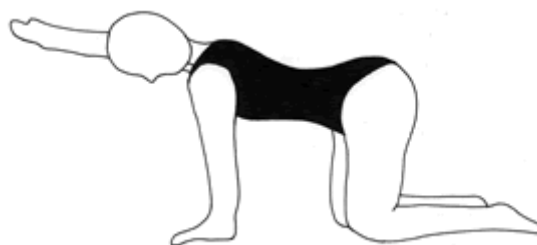
You can also lift the leg straight up and down and do small circles to further challenge the muscles.

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 or your back to sink or arch. Keep inhaling, relaxing the core muscles and exhaling, gently engaging your core muscles as you move.



Lying down is the easiest position to learn core engagement but the same principles can be applied to exercise standing up when you prefer

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 instead of drawing in, or you get back pain doing it, you are not ready for this exercise yet. You may need more time or some head support. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Try to use the exhale and engaging the core gently as you have been practising, when lifting your baby or car seat etc.

Scan the code to bring you to the physio page for more postnatal videos.

You may find a good local postnatal yoga or pilates class or aquanatal class to help you progress further. There are some excellent resources online eg.

www.bumproom.ie (bumproom25off - discount code) or the Moco app.

