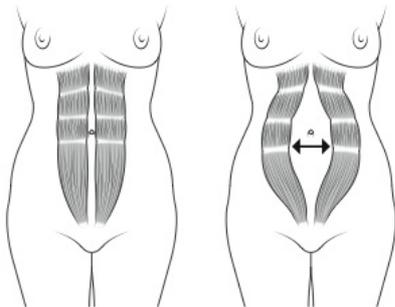


So you've had your baby and now it's time to do crunches, lots and lots of crunches, to get your abs back in shape again. Right? Well, actually no. Fitness and exercise after pregnancy is a lot more complicated than that. In fact, exercises like crunches may actually do more harm than good in the initial postpartum period.

[www.befitmom.com/abdominal\\_reconditioning.html](http://www.befitmom.com/abdominal_reconditioning.html)

### What is an Abdominal Muscle Separation?

An Abdominal Muscle Separation is the separation of the long muscles of the abdomen. It is also known as a 'Diastasis'.



### What causes this separation?

A combination of factors during pregnancy can cause a separation of the abdominal muscles to occur. These include:

- hormonal changes
- weight gain
- abdominal muscle weakness and stretching of the muscles as your baby grows.

### What it might mean to you

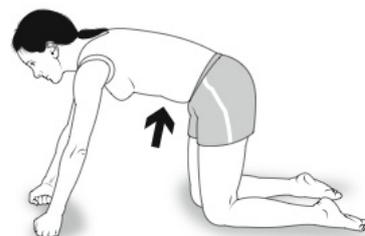
A separation is a normal safety mechanism to avoid the muscles tearing as your baby grows. It only becomes a problem if the muscles stay separated postnatally. Stretched and separated muscles do not provide full support for your back and may increase the incidence of back pain and back injury.

### What can be done to help?

- Exercises to strengthen the deep abdominal muscles.
- Wearing an abdominal support belt, such as Tubigrip™, or firm compressive underwear.
- Avoiding sit-ups or abdominal crunches until the separation resolves.
- Rolling when getting into or out of bed.
- Minimising lifting anything heavier than your baby or anything that causes your tummy to bulge with strain.

### Deep abdominal muscle strengthening exercises

1. Begin your exercise in one of the following positions; side lying, lying on your back, sitting, standing or 4 point kneeling.
2. Draw your lower tummy in towards your spine.
3. Hold for 5–10 seconds while breathing normally.
4. Rest and repeat 8–12 times.
5. Repeat this set of exercises 4 times each day.
6. To make your exercises harder, over the next 6 weeks do them in a sitting or standing position and increase your effort as you are able.



## **Check for abdominal separation**

Self-check video at [www.thetummyteam.com/physical-therapy/diastasis-recti/](http://www.thetummyteam.com/physical-therapy/diastasis-recti/)

1. Lying on your back with your knees bent place your fingertips in the centre of your belly at the level of your belly button.
2. Lift your head off the floor (keep shoulders on the floor) and press in with your fingers feeling for the sides of your abdominal muscles, a bit like a valley with 2 ridges on either side.
3. If you can fit more than 2 fingers in sideways (which is about 2cm) then you probably have muscle separation.
4. You can check this just above and just below your belly button also.
5. If you have separation, start the process of rebuilding your strength gently (as per exercises on this sheet) before you do any strong exercise or crunches.

## **Extra important points**

- \* Support belt or SPC Recovery Shorts: You can order these online but it's ideal to be diagnosed and fitted by a specialist physiotherapist who can order these for you.
- \* Always brace tummy and pelvic floor when you bend, lift, twist, get up, sit or lie down, roll over in bed.
- \* In yoga or pilates: no twists, back bends, abdominal crunches or oblique crunches.
- \* Always roll to your side when getting in or out of bed or off the floor.

## **Pelvic floor exercises are essential for your recovery**

Check with your physiotherapist or pilates or yoga teacher that you're doing them correctly. We recommend ultrasound by a women's health physiotherapist to see and feel the right movement. At least once each day aim for:

- 3 sets of 10 quick squeezes, and
- 3 sets of 5 slow contractions, holding for a count of 5. Contract on the exhale.

**For diagnosis/treatment** visit a women's health physiotherapist. We recommend:

Alice Mackenzie and Robin Kerr, Integrated Pelvic Physiotherapy, Noosa Junction 5441 4764

Rebecca Steele, Hinteractive Physio, Cooroy 5442 5556

Caroline Kohl, PhysioSync, Noosa Junction 5448 0072

Helen Swift, Noosa Sports & Spinal Physiotherapy, Noosaville 5449 0024

Tylana Woodward, Physio Noosa, Civic Shopping Ctr 5455 5308

## **Abdominal Rehab Programs**

### **TUPLER TECHNIQUE**

An abdominal rehab program for diastasis recti using a belly splint plus specific exercises.

- \* Hinteractive Physio in Cooroy run seminars on the Tupler Technique. Contact Rebecca Steele T 5442 5556 [www.hinteractivephysio.com.au](http://www.hinteractivephysio.com.au) and visit facebook page Abdominal Rehab.
- \* Read about Tupler and diastasis recti at [www.thebellyfirm.com.au](http://www.thebellyfirm.com.au) or [www.tummyzip.com](http://www.tummyzip.com)

### **MUTU SYSTEM**

A holistic 12 week program for postnatal women with diastasis recti, using exercise, diet and lifestyle changes, with online support. [www.mutusystem.com](http://www.mutusystem.com)



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