



LOLA & LYKKE®

CORE HEALTH

DURING & AFTER PREGNANCY



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What happens to your core during pregnancy



The main function of our abdominal muscles is to provide support for the lumbar spine and stabilize the joints of the pelvis. Put a baby in the middle and that's when things can go slightly out of balance. A growing baby belly means your anterior muscles (those at the front) stretch and your pelvis begins to tip forward – altering your ability to stabilize this region. Your baby bump grows at a gradual rate that your body is equipped to deal with, but sometimes your core needs some extra support during pregnancy.

During pregnancy your body is flooded with the hormone **Relaxin**, which allows your muscles to become much more compliant to lengthening and stretching. Sometimes the abdominal muscles become increasingly elongated during pregnancy which can lead to lack of core stability. This can cause a few challenges in the later stages of pregnancy, especially around the time when there's a baby sitting on your pelvis and you need core control more than ever.

Tips for a healthy pregnancy

1. **Note to newbies** - if you weren't active before you got pregnant, don't suddenly go mad! If you start an aerobic exercise, like running, swimming, cycling or walking, stick to 15 minutes exercise, three times a week. Then increase gradually to at least four 30-minute sessions a week.



2. **Daily dose** - half an hour of walking every day can be enough, but if you can't manage that, any amount of everyday exercise helps. Why not monitor your activity levels using an easy exercise tracker - you'll be surprised how quickly it all adds up!

3. **Ditch dehydration** - drink plenty of water and other fluids.

4. **Stay cool** - it's important you don't overheat, so avoid strenuous exercise in hot weather.

5. **Tell the teacher** - if you go to exercise classes, make sure your teacher is properly qualified, and knows how many weeks pregnant you are.

6. **Dodge danger** - avoid any hazardous exercise or sport where there's a risk falling or being hit.

7. **Swimming, walking and yoga** - the best exercise for mums-to-be!

How to strengthen your core during pregnancy

While pregnancy is not the time to introduce strenuous new training programs, **exercise to strengthen the core can be very advantageous**. As your muscles stretch they naturally want to switch off, but if you exercise them it helps the brain keep the muscles activated and working.

During pregnancy, it is recommended to focus on **strengthening the lower abdominal muscles** by adopting exercises such as the pelvic tilt. Pregnant women should steer clear of crunches and integrated ab exercises (such as planks) in the later stages of pregnancy, as this is when there is already a lot of stress on the muscles.

Pregnancy is also a good time to start **strengthening pelvic floor muscles** – this is where kegel exercises come in. It's also a good idea to work on maintaining glute tone during pregnancy, as the glutes play an important role in helping support the sacroiliac joint, which can be put to the test once your baby arrives and the regular lifting and carrying kicks in. Bodyweight squats are a great exercise for this.



Safe exercises for pregnancy

Core training during pregnancy goes beyond just strengthening your 'abs'. While tightening and toning is definitely a goal for many mums, core training is all about learning how to strengthen your entire deep core. Here are some safe exercises to try.

CORE ACTIVATION

You can activate your core anytime, anywhere. Imagine you are hugging/squeezing your baby and lifting the baby up with your core muscles. In a seated position, start by exhale as you gently do a kegel. Draw your lower belly in, up and around. Remember, core activation is NOT sucking in, it is a drawing in and lifting up movement.

CAT/COW

Begin on all fours in a table top position with a flat back. Make sure your shoulders are directly over your wrists, and your hips are over your knees. Inhale to arch your back, reaching your tailbone to the sky and chest forward (Cow). Exhale to round your spine with your head and tailbone reaching for the ground while the middle of the back reaches for the spine (Cat). Try to draw your belly button to spine and hug your baby during the Cat phase. Repeat for 20-30 seconds while maintaining a good form.



BRIDGE

Start on your back (only if you can comfortably get up and down). Engage your pelvic floor (think kegals) and draw your core up. Push through your heels and squeeze your bottom to push your hips off the ground. Focus on keeping the core engaged during the entire moment and hold for 5-10 seconds. Try not to over arch your back. Relax and repeat 10 times.

If you can't feel your pelvic floor engaged, squeeze a pillow or small ball between your knees while performing the exercise.



These exercises are safe to do during pregnancy; however each pregnancy is different and if you have any questions or apprehension about exercising during pregnancy, please consult with your physiotherapist or healthcare provider.

Support Garment for Pregnancy

During pregnancy, we experience a number of uncomfortable symptoms, including pack pain. Using a belly band will help you reduce and even avoid this type of discomfort. As a result, you'll be more free to go ahead with your daily activities without discomforts.

Benefits of using a belly band during pregnancy:

- **Relieves upper and lower back pain** - Back pain is one of the most common discomforts during pregnancy. A belly band is a simple solution that can help you feel much better.
- **Provides stability to the spinal cord and improves back position** - It's often hard to maintain good posture when you're dealing with a heavy pregnancy belly. Using a belly band will improve your posture and keep your spinal column steady despite the changes your body is experiencing.
- **Reduces the pressure of your baby on your pelvic region** - The pressure your growing baby produces on your pelvis can be quite uncomfortable. A supportive belly band can lessen this pressure considerably.
- **Belly bands adapt to your growing belly and changing body** - Belly bands adapt perfectly to the changing size and shape of our bellies. They are non-restrictive and adapt well to your body's movements.



CORE SUPPORT



EASES PRESSURE



EASES BACK PAIN



REDUCES
STRETCH MARKS

Lola&Lykke®

Maternity Bamboo Belly Band

Lola&Lykke® Maternity Bamboo Belly Band is recommended by physiotherapists, who specialize in core health during and after pregnancy.

Made with stretchy and breathable materials, the band is designed to lift the weight of your growing belly. There's also a handy hot/cold pack included for the back pocket to relieve back pain.

[Learn more](#)



SAY GOODBYE TO PREGNANCY DISCOMFORTS



DOUBLE-LAYER SUPPORT SYSTEM

Two adjustable compression straps with easy hook and loop fasteners help lift up the belly and support the back



STRETCHY AND BREATHABLE

Natural bamboo for ultimate comfort lets your skin breathe and won't trap heat inside



ERGONOMIC SUPPORT TAKES THE WEIGHT OFF BELLY

Features a back pocket for hot and cold therapy relief designed to ease back pain

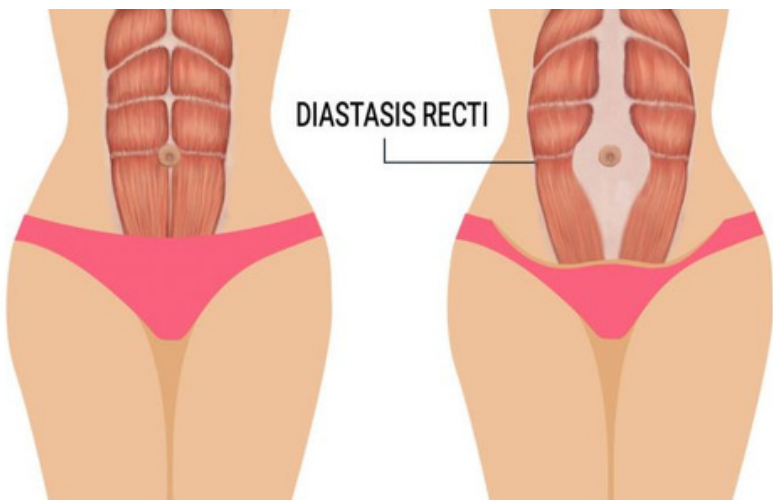


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Diastasis Recti

What is Diastasis Recti?

Diastasis recti is the partial or complete separation of the rectus abdominis, or “six-pack” muscles, which meet at the midline of your stomach. Diastasis recti is very common during and following pregnancy. This is because the uterus stretches the muscles in the abdomen to accommodate your growing baby. One study found that about 2/3 of women may experience diastasis recti during pregnancy or postpartum. Diastasis is more common the more pregnancies the woman has, if she is over 35 when pregnant, or if she has a heavy baby or twins, triplets or more.



The condition isn't limited to pregnancy, though. It can affect anyone, including newborn babies and men. In some cases, it can result from lifting heavy weights incorrectly or performing excessive or unsafe abdominal exercises.



So, how does abdominal separation work? Your abdominal muscles (rectus abdominis or your “six-pack”) are two vertical bands that run all the way from your breast bone down to your pubic bone. They are attached to thin muscle tissue that runs right down your midline called linea alba. The linea alba holds all of your ab muscles in place.

When you’re pregnant, hormones soften your ligaments, muscles and joints to make room for your baby and prepare for labour. That includes your linea alba. Typically, your ab muscles will lengthen vertically first, but when they reach their max the linea alba stretches to give baby more room as she grows. During pregnancy, this doesn’t cause pain and you won’t even be aware that it’s happening. Your ab muscles are already in two parts, but if needed the space between the muscles increases to create a larger space for the baby. The separation will begin at your belly button and depending on how you carry the baby it will either extend up or down as necessary.

Repairing Diastasis Recti after birth is key, as it not only helps to reduce your “mummy pooch” but getting your core strength back after pregnancy is essential to support your overall wellbeing, good posture and your spine health.

Do I have Diastasis Recti?

It's pretty safe to assume that every mum experiences some degree of abdominal separation during pregnancy. In some cases, it can be detected while you are still pregnant around the **25-week mark** either on an ultrasound or during an exam but becomes more difficult to diagnose later in pregnancy. If the muscles stay separated after birth, they won't be properly aligned to support your back and posture.

The separation (diastasis) is exactly what your body is supposed to do when it's pregnant if it needs to. The issue is only when it doesn't snap back together in your post-partum months.

As symptoms of diastasis recti, **you might feel a general weakness in your core, or you might notice a protruding belly.** You might even continue to look like you're four months pregnant. Some women experience continued incontinence past 8 weeks post-partum. In other cases, back pain might be present. Many of these symptoms are common post-partum issues, so abdominal separation is often not diagnosed.



To test for diastasis recti, lay on your back with your feet flat on the floor and knees bent. Curl your head up off the floor so your rectus or "six-pack" muscles are engaged and feel along the indent down the centre of your stomach. That's the linea alba, the tissue that stretched when you were pregnant. Start at the belly button and feel just above and below in a vertical line. If your fingers can press down, you may have ab separation.

Again, a small gap is normal. It's important to determine the width of the gap and push down gently to see if there is any tension or pushback, or if your fingers sink right down. You want to assess the width and, more importantly, the depth of the split. You can measure the width with your fingers. **One- to two finger-widths is normal; three or more could be a sign of diastasis recti.**

Your healthcare practitioner or a fitness professional trained in postpartum exercise would also be able to confirm the extent of your abdominal separation.



Not everyone needs special care to heal diastasis recti. Don't worry if you have a separation and you're less than eight weeks postpartum - healing takes time. During this period, many women are lucky enough to experience a 'spontaneous recovery', meaning the connective tissue linking the large ab muscles knits back together or comes close enough to restore normal core function.

Those who are not fortunate enough to recover spontaneously typically won't know they have a problem until symptoms arise in the weeks, months and sometimes years after giving birth. If for several months or even years after pregnancy you look like you're still five months pregnant despite having lost weight and fitting back into your normal jeans – except for your belly – usually it's not about baby weight but diastasis recti.

How do I heal Diastasis Recti?

There are plenty of simple things you can do after your baby has arrived to help heal your core.

Changing the way in which you use your body for daily tasks is the first step to healing diastasis. Bending forward to lift something from the floor is a big no-no (especially a heavy toddler). The forward bend allows your belly to hang, putting pressure on those weak, separated abs. Instead, use your legs to execute a squat position as you pick up anything (including your baby). As you lift back to standing, be mindful to keep your core engaged by cinching your belly button in towards your spine, working your ansvrse abdominal muscles and using your arm and leg strength to aid you in handling the weight of the object you are picking up.

The key to healing diastasis recti is rebuilding your core from the inside out. You need to strengthen the transverse abdominis (TVA) muscle, which is the deepest abdominal muscle and can provide support for those muscles that have been stretched. It is also very important to regain strength in your pelvic floor and diaphragm, which work in conjunction with your ab muscles. Remember to breathe and engage your pelvic floor during any daily movements or when doing specific postnatal exercises.





GENERAL RULES TO POSTNATAL CORE TRAINING

Avoid any crunches and planking until you have regained strength in your abs and have started to close the gap, since doing exercises that are too difficult can actually make diastasis recti worse. Always listen to your body and pay attention to what is going on in your core.

Exercise after pregnancy is important, but if you start doing exercises too early after childbirth, you might actually set yourself back. And what's more, exercises can only go so far if your other daily movements don't support the work — there's a whole bunch of non-exercise things, like how you breathe and how you hold your body (read: suck in your stomach) that can place unnatural loads on your linea alba, the connective tissue in your abdomen.

6 SIMPLE STEPS TO SUPPORT YOUR RECOVERY

For the majority of pregnancies Diastasis Recti is unavoidable but there are a few things that you can do to help:

1. Avoid lifting too heavy during pregnancy
2. See a pelvic floor physio during & post pregnancy
3. When sitting up out of bed engage lower abs first - activating the pelvic floor & transverse abdominals. OR turn on your side and push up using your hands.

4. Strengthen your core properly postpartum. Don't rush back into core exercises until you've been cleared by a doctor or specialist.
5. Avoid crunches, sit-ups, abdominal twists and leg lifts: You might think more aggressive and traditional forms of abdominal exercises would get you results faster, but your priority needs to be strengthening your transverse abdominis first. If you attempt more traditional ab exercises and notice any "pooching" or "doming," that's a clear sign that your core hasn't healed enough yet to do these types of exercises.
6. Depending on your individual circumstances, consider using a support garment during the immediate postnatal period to give your core the extra support it needs.

HELP IS ALWAYS AT HAND

As you deep-breathe your abs back together, remember: regardless of how long you've had a diastasis, it can be corrected. Only in rare cases, when physiotherapy doesn't result in recovery, is surgery necessary (this is usually only an option when there's a hernia to repair.)

In what is called abdominoplasty or, more specifically, a muscle plication (a.k.a. a tummy tuck), the muscles are surgically stitched back together. This is a major surgery and should not be considered an easy way out. Recovery from abdominoplasty can take a couple of months; for the first two weeks, doctors discourage patients from lifting anything, including their babies. After six weeks you can resume most normal function, but not your ab workout.

The option that's easiest on the stomach? **Find a good specialist.** Look for a physiotherapist trained in pelvic floor therapy, or a personal trainer with a background in kinesiology, exercise physiology or who has taken an accredited course on treating abdominal diastasis.

How to regain core strength after childbirth

Postnatal Exercises

After pregnancy, you're probably eager to get your post-baby body back in shape. But before jumping into your usual ab workouts, there are some special considerations that new moms need to take into account:

- Start small and slow
- Monitor your bleeding or better yet wait for it to stop
- Monitor your pelvic floor
- Check if you have diastasis recti and repair it first
- Allow your C-Section incision heal
- Be aware of wobbly joints as the prenatal hormone Relaxin is still within your system for 8 weeks postpartum
- Always stay hydrated
- Rest, rest and rest
- Stop if you feel any pain and, if in doubt, call your GP or nurse



With that in mind, here are some safe postnatal exercises that you can try to kick-start your physical recovery:

PELVIC TILTS

Lie on your back with your knees bent as in a glute bridge stance. Lift your hips off the ground until your knees, hips and shoulders form a straight line. Tighten your abdominal muscles by pulling in and imagining your belly button moving toward your spine. Hold your bridged position for a couple of seconds before easing back down.



KEGELS

To activate your pelvic floor, imagine you are stopping the flow of urine. Hold muscles for 10 seconds (don't hold your breath) and slowly release. Do 20 holds 5 times a day. This exercise can be done while sitting or standing—even when nursing!



ABDOMINAL BRACING

Abdominal bracing is simply tensing (contracting) the abs as if you are about to be hit in the stomach. Bracing involves contracting your deep abdominal muscles by gently drawing in the abdominal muscles below your belly button toward your spine and up slightly, holding this position for as long as you comfortably can. Make sure not to pull in the muscles too hard. If you notice yourself holding your breath, check your technique and ensure you keep breathing comfortably during the exercises.



ABDOMINAL BRACING IN A CHAIR

One exercise that places minimal strain on your back is to sit on a chair, bracing your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles as you slowly lift one leg (not too high). Try not to move your hips or body and be sure that you feel no downward strain on your pelvic floor. Breathe normally as you do this, and then lower. Build up to 10 repetitions on each side, making sure you do each one well.

Learn more about safe exercises after pregnancy [here](#).

Support Garment for Postnatal period

Support garments like the Core Restore postnatal support band can be used to give temporary support to your core while your abdominal muscles are not working as well as they should be. When using support garments, you should always pay attention to your comfort and never wear the band too tightly. When bound too tightly, postpartum wraps can actually worsen your core by putting more pressure on the pelvic floor, which already struggles to function well when abs are weak.

In general, after your core has been weakened by hormones and the physical effects of pregnancy, targeted compression offered by the Core Restore band helps promote more effective core recovery and better posture. The band can help realign your muscles, improve circulation and activate your core muscles after birth. The band also helps repair diastasis recti by gently pushing separated abdominal muscles back together and by encouraging better posture. We always recommend combining the use of our postnatal support band with gentle pelvic floor exercises to build back your core strength.

How a support band helps:

- Support your **core muscles**, pelvis and ligaments weakened by pregnancy hormones
- Helps you **regain your core strength** by gently realigning and reactivating your core muscles
- **Reduces hip and back pain** by helping you maintain good posture during your daily activities



EASES BACK PAIN



DAILY SUPPORT



REGAIN SHAPE



STABILIZE WOUND



Lola&Lykke®

Core Restore Support Band

Lola&Lykke® Core Restore Support Band is recommended by physiotherapists. It is suitable for both natural birth and c-section.

The band's unique dual fastening panels allow for a perfect fit for any body type as the upper and lower compression panels can be tightened separately. It is comfortable to wear, adjusting to your body's normal movement.



[Learn more](#)



DUAL COMPRESSION

Two separate panels to support recovery



HYPOALLERGENIC

Non-allergenic and suitable for sensitive skin



BREATHABLE

Individually weaved compression stripes allow an airflow