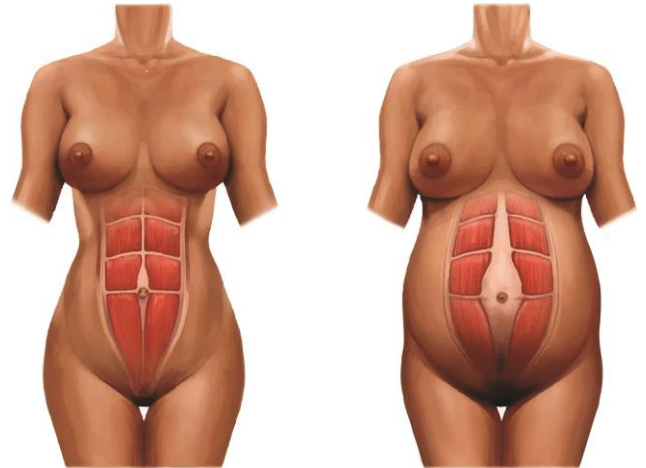




Abdominal Exercises during Pregnancy

- During pregnancy your abdominal muscles have to stretch to make room for your baby. Abdominal muscles support your back. As they stretch, they get weaker and it means your back has less support.
- Your six pack muscle has a left and right muscle, which is joined in the middle by connective tissue. As the baby grows, these muscles can come apart to allow more room for the baby.
- A small gap is normal during pregnancy.
- If you see your tummy forming a point then you have a gap in your muscles and will need to look after your back and abdominals. Preventing this gap from becoming too big, stops back pain.



Tips that help

- Remember to roll over to get out of bed and push up with your arms.
- To get out of a chair lean well forwards and use your bottom muscles not your tummy to get up.
- Don't strain e.g. with constipation or lift heavy weights such as other children.
- Avoid strong abdominal exercises such as full planks, sit-ups and bicycle crunches.

Protect your tummy and back by working the deeper tummy muscles

1. The deep tummy muscles - Transversus Abdominus

This is your bikini line tummy muscle. It wraps around your tummy forming a corset for your spine and pelvis. It supports your joints as the ligaments loosen. You can do this exercise side lying or standing.

Side lying

- Side lying with knees bent up. Let your tummy sag out.
- Gently draw your lower tummy (not your whole tummy) in towards your back. It takes practise to get this right.
- Continue to breathe gently. HOLD tummy in for five seconds. Relax. Practise until you can manage to hold for ten seconds.



Standing

- Relaxed standing, shoulders down, arches in feet pulled up.
- Imagine you are zipping up tight trousers. Tuck your tummy in away from the zip. Hold it there for five seconds whilst breathing normally. DO NOT hold your breath.
- Practise your tummy tucks all day long. **Tuck your tummy in every time you move or have to stand for long periods of time.**



2. The oblique/diagonal tummy muscles

Targeting the middle tummy muscles.

- Sit straight up on a chair, feet on cushions or flat on floor.
- Gently tuck your tummy in. Hold it in and keep breathing. Place opposite hand on inside of knee. Push your hand into your knee and your knee into your hand.
- These forces should be equal such that your leg or hand does not move. Count to five then repeat with other leg.
- Aim for 8-10 times, 2-3 times a day.
- If you have pubic bone pain, working the obliques will help stabilise the pubic bone and decrease pain, making it easier to walk.



For more information

- Liaw LJ, et al. The relationships between inter-recti distance measured by ultrasound imaging and abdominal muscle function in postpartum women: A 6-month follow-up study. *The Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy*. 2011;41:435.
- <http://pregnancyexercise.co.nz/> Reputable source of information for exercise in Pregnancy.

For other helpful tips, please see:

- Pelvic floor exercise in pregnancy
- Exercise in pregnancy

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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