



# ABDOMINAL EXERCISES YOU CAN DO IN PREGNANCY

Preventive care to minimise abs  
separation, back pain and stay active  
during pregnancy



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## ABDOMINAL EXERCISES IN PREGNANCY

Our bodies, and core in particular go through tremendous changes, e.g. our waistline can increase by 50cm (20in) by the end of pregnancy. 66% of pregnant ladies will develop abdominal separation in the middle of our tummy, leaving our abs weak and putting more strain on our back and pelvic floor. This guide walks you through the preventive care for our abdominal muscles during pregnancy. And no crunches!

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As a mum of Lena and currently expecting another child, Kasia went through all the stages of pregnancy, recovery and return to fitness. She designed the pregnancy specific fitness and early postnatal rehab programme to help other mums, who want to prevent or minimise the effects pregnancy has on our bodies. All tried and tested by herself!

Kasia has been always passionate about fitness and for the last 10 years qualified as Instructor to Music, Les Mills instructor, Level 3 Personal Trainer and Pre and Postnatal specialist in exercise and nutrition.

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# CHAPTER 1

## IMPACTS OF PREGNANCY ON YOUR TUMMY

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# ABDOMINAL CHANGES

During pregnancy the hormone relaxin facilitates the stretching of the abdominal muscles in all directions. Connective tissue within the muscles provides some elasticity, but changes to the abdominal wall muscles can be more dramatic and remain for up to 12 months after the birth (post partum). The waistline may increase by approximately 50cm (20 inches) and the rectus abdominis may lengthen by approximately 20 cm (8 inches). This is due to the growth of the uterus and our baby.

The most dramatic changes occur in the linea alba, the line of connective tissue that runs down between the two halves of the rectus abdominis muscle. The linea alba increases its elasticity in both directions. By the third trimester the width of the linea alba may be between 2-4cm with the greatest width typically at the level of the umbilicus or just above.

Pregnancy mostly impacts the deep abdominal muscles (transversus abdominis, TrA) and outer abs (six pack): rectus abdominis (RA)





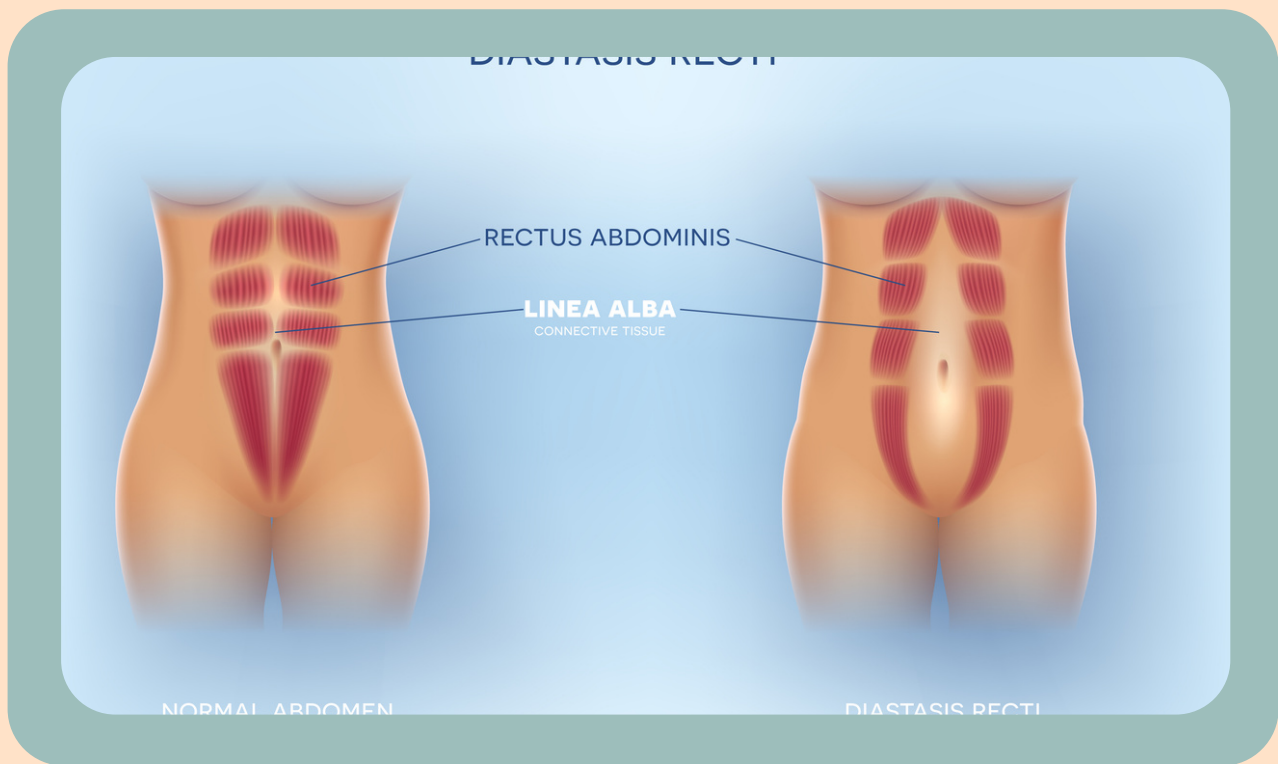
## CHAPTER

# 2

## WHAT IS ABS SEPARATION

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## **DIASTASIS RECTI, AKA ABS SEPARATION**

As the baby grows, the two bands of recti muscle that were previously parallel stretch away from the midline. This is known as diastasis recti, also known as abdominal separation – the separation of the recti muscles - and is quite common, occurring in 66% of women in the last trimester.

The width between the recti muscles may become as much as 20cm and the recti widens along the whole length of the muscle. Recti widening is more likely in women with a narrow pelvis, those who have carried large babies, had a multiple pregnancy, or several pregnancies, perhaps close together. This is a completely normal occurrence and typically the gap between the recti muscles returns by itself to roughly two fingers width apart by 8 weeks postpartum. But some ladies suffer from excessive gap, that causes 'doming' or bulging of the abdominal muscles.





# 3

## CHAPTER

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO  
HELP

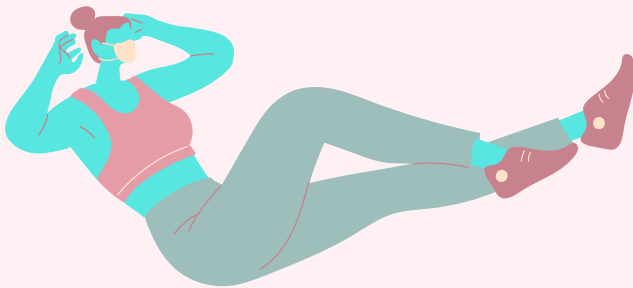
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# FIRSTLY DON'T DO:

anything that puts too much pressure on your abdominals. and baby. Avoid exercises in lying down (supine) position after trimester 1. The below 'typical' exercises can worsen the abdominal separation and should not be performed while pregnant.

## CRUNCHES

They put a lot of pressure on the weakened muscle and in the long term will slow down your progress. That includes straight leg raises too

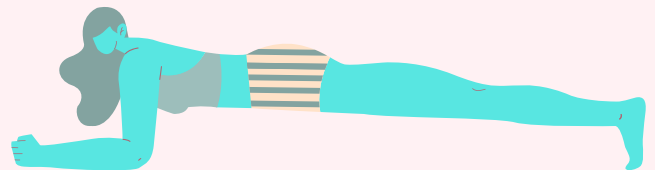


## TWISTING

Movements such as bicycle legs, Russian twists etc should be avoided.

## PLANKS

Planks, full press ups, mountain climbers create a lot of inter-abdominal pressure on the weakened floor. They can lead to tummy bulging and 'falling out'





## SAFE GUIDELINES FOR EXERCISING DURING PREGNANCY

- During the first trimester you can continue with your normal fitness routine. Always check with GP or a midwife.
- It is not recommended to do exercises in a supine position (lying on your back) after the first trimester
- Avoid exercising in conditions that are too hot or humid because it could increase your body temperature, and lead to dehydration
- Do not overdo certain abdominal exercises as it can lead to an increase pressure in the core
- Avoid doing any exercises that involve abrupt movements, twists or turns.
- Most important core to work is the transverse abdominis



“

Baby is not an excuse, it should be a reason. Staying active is one of the best ways for a healthy pregnancy, easier birth and quicker recovery. It's not a miracle cure, but something that we commit to and chip away, day by day. Don't count the days, make the days count!

”

K A S I A @ F I T 4 T W O . C O . U K



# CHAPTER

# 4

## ABDOMINAL EXERCISES WE CAN STILL DO WHILE PREGNANT

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# DEEP CORE STABILISING

Training transversus abdominis (the deep stabilising core muscle) is crucial in pregnancy, to minimise abs separation and mis-recruitment of other muscles, leading to back and pelvic pain. Aim for 10-20 repetitions

## ABDOMINAL HOLLOWING

- Lie down in neutral spine position
- Inhale and on **EXHALE** pull belly in and up at the navel, without moving rib cage, pelvis or spine
- Only 30% activation of the transversus abdominis is needed



## 4-POINT KNEELING, ABDOMINAL HOLLOWING

- Start with a neutral spine in a 4-point kneeling position (on hands and knees).
- Inhale and on exhale gently draw your core in (brace the core), continue to breath and hold that position for 5-10 sec



## MODIFIED CURL UP (TRIMESTER 1 ONLY)

- Lie down, tilt your pelvis towards your ribs and brace your core
- On exhale lift your head and shoulders off the floor (belly should be flat and not bulging)
- Trace your hands up your thighs to help





# DEEP CORE STABILISING

## PELVIC TILTS (TRIMESTER 1)

- Lie down in neutral spine position
- Hollow/brace abdominal muscles to gently posterior rotate your pelvis until lower back lightly touches the floor.
- Hold for a count of 6 while breathing throughout



## PELVIC TILTS (TRIMESTER 2, 3)

- Sit tall in neutral spine, eye-line lifted (can use a chair or a ball)
- Gently tuck your pelvis under and then return in the opposite direction.

## SEATING KNEE LIFTS

- Sit near the edge of your chair or on a ball
- Keep your feet flat on the floor directly under your knees
- Slowly contract your abdomen by bending your left knee in such a way that it tilts your pelvis and activate pelvic floor .
- Then, slowly bring your left knee towards your chest as you exhale.
- Inhale and lower your left foot to the floor





# OTHER ABS EXERCISES



## STANDING BICYCLE

- Standing with your feet hip width distance apart, hands behind head, inhale
- Then exhale bring your left elbow to meet your right knee as you crunch
- Repeat it with your left foot and right elbow

## STANDING CRUNCH

- Stand straight with your feet hip distance apart, knees slightly bent and hands behind your head.
- Inhale pull your belly button in and tuck your pelvis
- Exhale, and crunch forward squeezing your abdominal muscles just the way you do it while lying on your back



## HEEL SLIDES

- Start on the ground in a glute bridge position
- Lifting your heel a little above the ground, extend one leg at a time.
- Slowly come to your original position.
- Repeat on the other leg.



# OTHER ABS EXERCISES

## CAT COW POSE

- Start on the floor on your hands and knees in tabletop position
- Inhale and look upward and arch your back, let your belly hang.
- Then exhale, tuck in your chin and your tailbone, and draw your belly inward towards your spine.
- Keep doing the inhaling and exhaling exercise in such a way that you can match your breathing rhythm to your movements as much as you can.
- Repeat the steps for around two minutes, take a break and resume.



## BIRD-DOG CRUNCHES

- Start in tabletop position (wrists directly under your shoulders and knees under your hips, back straight.)
- Tighten core and slowly inhale and lift your left leg and extend it in a straight line behind you while you also lift up your right arm straight in front of you.
- Exhale bring left knee to meet right elbow in the middle
- Inhale return and repeat for 10-12 reps
- Then repeat the same steps with your opposite hand and leg.



# 5

## CHAPTER

# NEXT FIT STEPS

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# SMALL STEPS TO FITTER PREGNANCY

- Join Fit Bumps and Mums community on Facebook for more information and advice  
[Fit Bumps and Mums of Petersfield area | Facebook](#)  
[Fit Bumps and Mums UK | Facebook](#)
- Follow Fit4Two: [Fit4Two | Facebook](#)







# FIT4BIRTH

online, on-demand programme, that focuses on maintaining strength and stamina whilst being safe during pregnancy and adding those extra elements to focus on our core and pelvic floor. Strength and toning 20-30min workouts that you can do at your own pace and intensity level. Modifications and options suggested.

At the end you will feel fitter, healthier, better prepared for labour and happier.

<https://www.fit4two.co.uk/fit-for-birth>

Exclusive to Petersfield, Hampshire: personalised programme with in-person classes or 1-on-1 personal training, nutrition advice for increased benefits. classes on Tuesdays, 17:30 in Stroud Village Hall