

## Post natal care for mums

### Rectus Diastasis

If you have had children or even looked at a woman who is 9 months pregnant you will appreciate how the stomach muscles become stretched during pregnancy. Depending on the size of the mother, size of the baby and tightness of your abdominals, it can (and usually does) result in a split in the outer layer of muscle. This muscle is called rectus abdominus, this is the muscle responsible for us having a six pack 😊, and sits the most superficial of all the abdominals. The muscle has two portions running down either side of a thickened band in the centre which runs down the front of your abdominals. This is where the split appears. When the muscles are stretched to their limit, they pull at the thick band from either side and cause it to split.

Depending on factors like the size of your baby compared to you, and the tightness or laxity of your muscles will affect whether this is a large split or just a small one. This split can occur both above and below your belly button.

To palpate this lie on your back with your knees bent, and palpate/ feel the area directly below your belly button. Now do a small crunch and you may feel a split in the abdominals, with a thick band type feeling on either side of the gap. This is known as a rectus diastasis. This is measured by how many fingers you can place across the gap. You can repeat this above your belly button and there may also be a split.

Abdominal crunches and sit ups don't help to close this gap, in fact they make it worse! So if you have been slaving away on the Ab king or doing 100 sit ups a day, this will in fact be making it a whole lot worse! The muscles which need to be strengthened are your transverse abdominus, oblique's and pelvic floor which help to pull the rectus muscle together and therefore reduce the split. These are the deeper layers of muscles which act as your body's natural corset to pull everything together. Starting to initiate your pelvic floor muscles will assist with you continence post natively, as well as help to close the abdominal gap.

Ideally we would like you to do the correct exercises as soon as you are able to post natively, but even after a longer period and even years you can still reduce the split in the muscle. Pilates based exercises, if performed correctly will assist with this, as well as pelvic floor exercises and swiss ball exercises. It is important to do the correct exercises otherwise the split will be made worse / bigger and may result in a permanent split.

# **Mangawhai Physiotherapy**

4a Wood Street, Mangawhai Heads

**09 431 4476**

---

If you would like to be assessed, and given an exercise program to assist with strengthening your abdominals post nataly, and with reducing the abdominal split then please contact your nearest physiotherapist.