

On Postpartum Exercise and Diastasis Recti

While it is important to be cautious and safe while exercising during the pregnancy, one should also be careful postpartum as well.

Diastasis recti is an unnatural "split" between the rectus abdomini bundles. Lately it has received a bit more media attention and conversation amongst lay-circles. It is commonly associated with post-pregnancy, but may occur with currently pregnant women, and it can happen to men and children as well (Bowman, 2013).

Diastasis recti is the separation/thinning of the rectus abdominis muscles and stretching of the linea alba area which is formed by the aponeuroses of the abdominals (Bowman, 2013; Litos, 2014). Pressure on the linea alba by the abdomen causes a separation (Bowman, 2013). The high intra-abdominal pressure can be from various causes such as a baby or a Valsalva maneuver (Bowman, 2013). Anterior pelvic tilt can also contribute to increased pressure on the linea alba (Bowman, 2013).

Posture and alignment can help diastasis recti. Clients should avoid "tucking" the pelvis during exercises that attempt to engage the transverse abdominals, avoid spinal twist to a point beyond "comfortable", no "crunches", and the alignment of the rib cage with the pelvis should be maintained as much as possible by proper alignment up the kinetic chain of the shoulders, neck, and head (Bowman, 2013). Definitely the condition of diastasis recti has varying degrees of severity and one should refer the client to a physician and physical therapist to better determine the course of action. In very severe cases, surgery may be necessary.

References

Bowman, K. (2013). Diastasis recti: When the abs don't come together. *IDEA Fitness Journal*, 10(5), 28-31.

Litos, K. (2014). Progressive therapeutic exercise program for successful treatment of a postpartum woman with a severe diastasis recti abdominis. *Journal Of Women's Health Physical Therapy*, 38(2), 58-73.