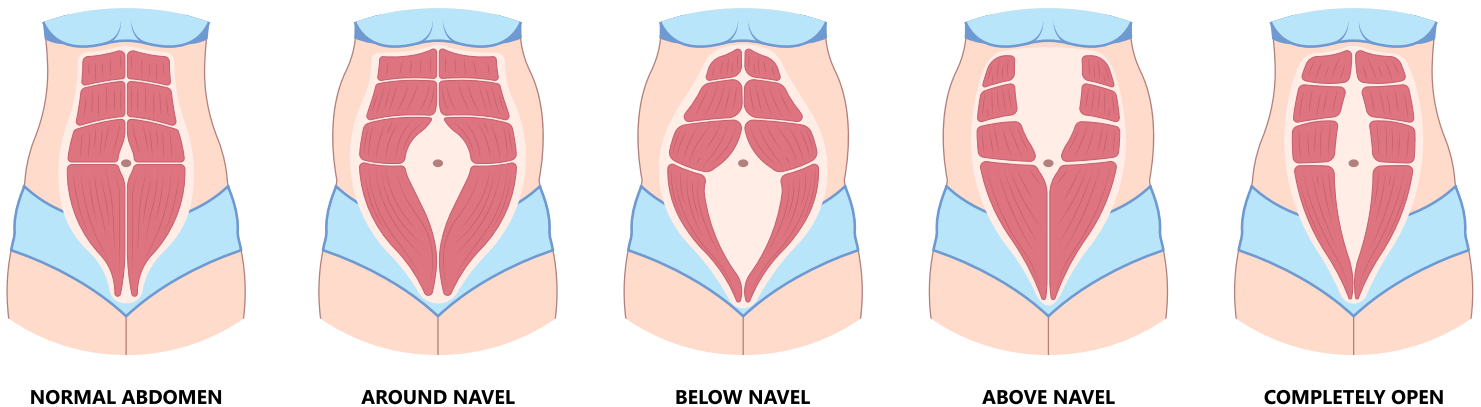


## Abdominal Muscle Separation (DRAM)

### What is it?

An abdominal muscle separation is where the abdominal muscle, commonly known as the '6 pack muscle', separates through the middle of the abdominal wall. This commonly affects pregnant women, but it can also occur in men and athletes.

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### What causes an abdominal muscle separation?

There are a number of factors which can contribute to the separation of your abdominal muscles during pregnancy. These include;

- Hormonal changes
- Weight gain
- Weakness and stretching of the abdominal wall as the baby grows

In other populations it can be due to:

- Heavy and repeated lifting
- Surgery to the abdominal region which can cause the muscles and ligaments to stretch and weaken
- An increase in abdominal weight

### **What does it mean if I have a an abdominal separation?**

Having a separation of your abdominal muscles is really common after birth. More than 50 percent of women have a separation after birth. Over the period of 6-8 weeks after the birth the body undergoes a huge amount of healing and recovery and lot of women have natural healing of their abdominal muscle separation.

For some women they continue to have a separation which can affect your core stability and thus increase the risk of back and pelvic pain, hernias and pelvic floor dysfunction. In fact more than 66 percent of women with an abdominal separation have some sort of pelvic floor related issues such as incontinence or prolapse.

### **How can I test to see if I have an abdominal separation?**

1. Lie on your back, knee bent and hip width apart
2. Place your fingers along the middle of your stomach, near your belly button
3. Try and relax your tummy muscles and then gently lift up your head and shoulder off the floor and see if you can feel a gap or bulge alongside your muscles
4. If you can feel a gap wider than your finger, you may have an abdominal muscle separation and it is worth seeking a proper assessment from your Pregnancy and Pelvic Health Physio.

### **What can I do to manage my abdominal separation?**

- Abdominal supports such as tubigrip, shapewear, bike shorts or some recovery brand shorts
- Strengthen your core muscles
- Avoid sits up and heavy lifting
- Try rolling out of bed rather than sitting directly upright