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Diastasis recti exercises before and after

Photos: Life by Daily Burn The female physique is, perhaps more than anything else, adaptable. Whether you're in your third trimester or already holding your bundle of joy, the power of a woman's body to grow and change is pretty darn incredible. Among those changes is diastasis recti — a separation that occurs between the right and left sides of your rectus abdominis (aka your six-pack muscle). This adjustment is a way for your body to make extra room for your baby during pregnancy. "The growing uterus exerts pressure on the abdominal wall, bulging the muscles forward and inducing separation. It's not a tear, but a sideways stretch of the linea alba or the connective tissue that runs vertically along the midline of the abdominal wall," explains Leah Keller, CPT, MA, founder of The Dia Method, a training program that helps women prevent and treat diastasis recti. RELATED: 50 Ab Exercises to Score a Stronger Core Why You Should Address Diastasis Recti Yes, diastasis recti is incredibly common (one 2016 study found that about 45 and 33 percent of women have diastasis recti at six months and 12 months postpartum, respectively). But that doesn't mean you should ignore it. "Although largely marginalized as a cosmetic concern about a 'mummy tummy' or pooch, diastasis recti has very real health consequences," Keller says. "When the abdominal muscles separate, the body lacks support for the back and the organs, and the integrity of the entire core is compromised." Without a strong core, your total-body function can suffer. Diastasis recti (DR) can even contribute to chronic back pain as well as pelvic floor dysfunction, Keller says. In fact, two-thirds of women with DR suffer from at least one pelvic floor dysfunction, such as pelvic organ prolapse or incontinence, according to research. RELATED: 5 Stability Ball Exercises for a Crazy Strong Core How Exercise Can Ease Diastasis Recti Good news, mamas! In one study co-authored by Keller and researchers at Weill Cornell Medicine, women who completed a specialized exercise program either during or following pregnancy significantly improved and rehabbed their core in as little as 12 weeks. That means strengthening the linea alba, closing the gap and improving function. "It is possible to fully resolve diastasis recti with exercise — but the proven therapeutic exercises are very specific and precise, and they are antithetical to the core exercises most people perform when they set out to improve core strength," Keller says. Translation: Skip the sit-ups. In fact, many abs exercises, like crunches and sit-ups, increase intra-abdominal pressure and actually bulge the abdominal muscles forward. Before performing any core exercise, Keller recommends asking yourself a few questions: Does this exercise cause my abs to bulge forward? Can I perform it without my ribs flaring and lower back arching? Both of these movements cause the two sides of the rectus abdominis to separate, Keller says, which worsens or triggers DR all on their own. Keller has actually worked with many women (and even men!) who have suffered from exercise-induced DR. RELATED: Hate Crunches? 6 Better Core Exercises for Beginners The Core Move You Need to Master After chatting with your doctor and getting the OK to exercise, the first step to alleviating DR and building a stronger, more-functional-than-ever core is mastering what Keller calls the "core compression." This involves a subtle pulsing contraction of your core's deep-lying transverse abdominis muscle (which acts as your body's built-in corset). To do a core compression, squeeze your core to draw your belly button in and up toward your spine — while simultaneously and forcefully exhaling. After all, if you squeeze your stomach in without exhaling, you'll actually increase your intra-abdominal pressure, hurting rather than helping the ab separation. By integrating core compressions into a variety of both midsection and total-body exercises, you draw your abs together, which strengthens these muscles and teaches your core how to properly support every move you make in life, she says. To practice the core compression exercise, sit upright with your knees bent at 90 degrees, spine lengthened. Make sure your ribs are not thrusting forward. Place your hands on your stomach and breathe normally. Then, simultaneously and forcefully emit a tiny exhale while squeezing your abs and pelvic floor up and into the spine. You should feel your belly flatten toward the spine as you exhale. Then relax on the inhale. Repeat in a slow, controlled pulsing rhythm, exhaling each time you engage your core. Got it? Good. Now you're ready to integrate these six diastasis recti-relieving exercises, courtesy of Keller's The Dia Method, into your post-pregnancy exercise routine. RELATED: Get Fit Fast with This Total-Body EMOM Workout 6 Exercises to Address Diastasis Recti Get to the core of your ab separation with these six exercises. For each one, make sure to incorporate core compressions to really help strengthen your midsection. Photo: Life by Daily Burn 1. Tabletop How to: Get on your hands and knees with your hands shoulder-width apart and your knees hip-width apart. Look just in front of your hands and maintain a neutral spine. Hold this position (a). From here, perform one core compression and then, while holding the first contraction, perform a second, feeling your stomach draw in closer to your spine (b). Pause, then relax the compressions (c). Perform two five-minute sets per day. Photo: Life by Daily Burn 2. Wall Sit How to: Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart about 1.5 feet in front of a wall. Bend your knees and hips to squat down so your back is flat against the wall. Hold this position (a). From here, perform one core compression and then, while holding the first contraction, perform a second, feeling your stomach draw in closer to your spine (b). Pause, then relax the compressions (c). Perform one two- to three-minute set 2-3 times per week. RELATED: 50 Butt Exercises to Sculpt Stronger Glutes Photo: Life by Daily Burn 3. Side Plank How to: Get in a side plank position on one forearm with your elbow directly underneath your shoulder. Bend your bottom knee so your foot is behind you for extra support. Your body should form one straight line from head to heels. Hold this position (a). From here, perform one core compression and then, while holding the first contraction, perform a second, feeling your stomach draw in closer to your spine (b). Pause, then relax the compressions (c). Perform one 30-second set, one 60-second set, and one 90-second set on each side 2-3 times per week. GIF: Life by Daily Burn 4. Single-Leg Lift How to: Lying on your back on the floor, plant your left foot on the ground, knee bent and right leg straight out in front of you. Place your hands slightly behind you (a). Inhale, then, with your right foot turned slightly outward, exhale and lift your leg up toward the ceiling, keeping your knee straight. Think about pulling your belly button in and up toward your spine for that core compression (b). Repeat for 20 reps, then switch sides. Perform two sets. RELATED: 4 Lower Body Exercises You Can Do in Front of Your TV GIF: Life by Daily Burn 5. Standing Thigh Toner How to: Standing on your right leg, with knee slightly bent and hands on your stomach. Your left leg should be just slightly out in front of you, toes on the floor and pointing slightly outward (a). Inhale and then on a forceful exhale, lift your left leg up toward the ceiling, just a slight bend in your knee. You should feel your abs pull in and up toward your spine (b). Return your foot back to the floor and repeat (c). Do 20 reps, then switch sides. Perform two sets. GIF: Life by Daily Burn 6. Triceps Kickbacks How to: Holding a light dumbbell (2 to 5 pounds) in each hand, stand with feet hip-width apart, slight bend in your knees. Lean slightly forward at the hips and pull your elbows back so your hands are at your waist. This is your starting position (a). With palms facing each other, straighten your arms back behind you on a forceful exhale. Remember to pull your belly button in and up toward your spine (b). Bend your elbows again to return to the starting position (c). Repeat for 20 reps and two sets. Read More No More Sit-Ups: 7 TRX Moves to Work Your Abs 6 Surprising Reasons You're Not Building Muscle The 22-Minute Workout You Need to Try Right Now I have been getting so many questions from mummies regarding Diastasis Recti and how to treat it. I wrote a HUGE nice long post on DA which you can read here, but now I am back to bring you a Diastasis Recti Workout Challenge to keep you motivated to healing those separated muscles.If you are unfamiliar with this condition, basically it is when your abdominal muscles split in two. Your abs will naturally stretch apart somewhat during pregnancy to make way for baby. However, a normal pregnancy should result in the abdominal muscles eventually closing back up together with no gaps (which can take up to 12 weeks or longer sometimes).However, when your abs stretch too much, something's gotta give. Think of a stretchy hair tie. You overuse it or stretch it too much and it won't go back to being tight and useful. It does not hold your hair in place right? You try to put your hair up with it and your hair falls out in bulges everywhere.The same holds true with your abs and DA. Your abs stretch so much that you cause gapping in between your two abdominal halves that cannot be naturally retracted. Instead, you are left with a 2in+ finger gap and a nice little (or huge) bulge at your belly otherwise known as the "mommy tummy."Unfortunately 1 in 2 women will develop DA during pregnancy whether it be from natural causes such as the size of your baby, being overweight, or having twins but you can also get DA by doing the WRONG exercises!Some exercises to avoid during pregnancy are:plankscrunchessi uprotating movesBasically avoid anything that makes your belly "cone" and puts extra, unnessary pressure on that already protruding tummy. I NEVER worked my abs during pregnancy and thus I have never gotten DA! Sometimes, you cannot help it. But most of the time, you can try.This simple self-test will help you determine if you have diastasis recti.Lie on your back with your knees bent upward, as if you are in the starting position for a crunch exercise.Place your fingers right above your belly button.Raise your head and shoulders off floor as if you are performing a crunch exercise.If you can feel a gap or see a buldging, then you could have a diastasis.For the next 28 days, you will be doing the following 4 moves to help you heal and to strengthen your core:Bird DogsMarchingAbdominal VacuumCat/Cow PoseFor a complete video of each move along with an example of the DA self test and 3 moves to avoid, watch the clip below and be sure to follow me on Instagram!BONUS MOVES ALSO INCLUDED IN CHALLENGE:Heel DropsPelvic TiltsHeel TapsSo, who's ready? Let's goooooo!Here is your printable chart. Feel free to hover your mouse over the image to save to Pinterest instantly!Rules:Take each move carefully and slowly.Practice deep inhalation and breathing with each move.No repeats! All you've got to do is what the day says to do.Stop if you feel any excess pressure or any pain.Always consult a doctor prior to beginning any exercise regime.I have been asked if women with Diastasis Recti can become one of my Strong Body Guide girls-YES, you can! As long as your DA isn't too severe and you've gotten your doctor's approval, we would love for you to join us. With thousands of women in our private online support group (free with purchase of the Strong Body Guide), we have quite a few ladies with DA whom you can talk to about modifying some of the moves and dealing with repairment!To check out my Strong Body Guide, click here!Your trainer and friend,

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