DIASTASIS RECTI

Diastasis recti is a separation of the abdominal muscles, specifically the rectus abdominal muscle, during pregnancy. Any separation larger than 2 cm or 2 fingerwidths apart is considered significant. It can occur above, below or at the level of the belly button. It is thought to be the result of hormonal effects on the connective tissue and the biomechanical changes that occur during pregnancy. Studies have reported the incidence of diastasis recti to be approximately 27% in the second trimester, 66% in the third trimester, and 62.5% of postpartum women within 92 hours of delivery.

Symptoms such as low back pain, due to the lack of abdominal support that helps to control the pelvis and low back, or difficulty performing tasks such as going from a laying down to sitting may result from a diastasis recti.

A simple test may be completed to check for diastasis recti. The woman should be laying down on her back with her knees bent, feet flat on floor. (Remember, this position should only be maintained for a short period of time while checking for a separation if after the 4th month.) The woman will slowly raise her head and shoulders off the floor reaching her hands towards her feet. The tester will place fingers of one hand horizontally across the midline of the abdomen at the belly button level. If a separation exists, the fingers will sink into the gap. Make sure to check above, below, and at the level of the belly button since it may occur at all three areas.

This condition can be reversed. It is important to perform corrective exercises specific for diastasis recti until there is a separation of 2 cm/fingerwidths or less. Once this condition has been corrected, the woman may resume regular abdominal exercises, however, should still monitor the abdominal area.

Many women may not even be aware they have a diastasis, but need help to ensure a strong and healthy life as well as preventing future injuries. For more information on diastasis recti and the correction of this condition, contact a physical therapist in your area.