

Ask the physiotherapist

AM I DOING DAMAGE?

Q My baby is three months old and I have been attending a high intensity workout class for the past two weeks. One of the exercises is a double leg lift and it hurts my back every time I do it. Should I keep doing it to strengthen my back or am I damaging myself?

A Stop doing the double leg lifts. Double leg lifts are very difficult to do normally, let alone in the months after having a baby. The reason for your back pain is that you cannot counteract the weight of your legs when they are lowered because your hip flexor muscles, which attach to the lower back, are strongly contracting and causing you to arch your back. Inform your instructor at the start of the class that you cannot do that particular exercise and they can give you something else to do then instead.

WILL PGP REOCCUR?

Q If I have PGP in my first pregnancy, will it come back in subsequent pregnancies?

A Recurrence rates are high. If you have suffered with PGP in the past and are pregnant again, please visit a chartered physiotherapist as soon as possible for a full assessment of your lower back and pelvis. This will allow identification of the reasons why you have developed PGP and a specific plan can be put in place to treat the condition before it begins to affect you.

WHAT IS DRAM?

Q I'm five months pregnant and recently came across the condition DRAM when I was reading up on pregnancy. What is DRAM and how would I know if I have it?

A DRAM stands for diastasis of the rectus abdominis muscle. As your bump grows, the abdominal wall muscles and their connective tissue attachments stretch to accommodate it. DRAM occurs

when the connective tissue joining your rectus muscles (the 'six-pack' muscles), widens and splits. This separation can affect the stability of the trunk and may contribute to pelvic floor dysfunction, back pain and pelvic pain during pregnancy and in the postnatal period.

You can test for DRAM by lying on your back with your knees bent up. Slowly raise your head and shoulders off the floor and feel the gap between the rectus muscles. A separation of greater than three fingers necessitates a visit to a chartered physiotherapist for some gentle abdominal strengthening work. If you have DRAM, avoid abdominal crunches and sit-ups as these will make the separation worse.

BREASTFEEDING NECK PAIN

Q My new baby is just four weeks but I have noticed a pain in my neck and down to my right shoulder every time I am breastfeeding her. What can I do about this?

A This is very normal in the first few weeks

postnatally. It is caused by a combination of tension in the muscles from fatigue (and often from worry about your new role as a mother), your breastfeeding position, and carrying around your baby with and without the car seat.

Follow these tips to ease a tense neck and shoulders:

- ♥ Use a hot pack on the area when you can, to help the muscle fibres relax.
- ♥ Stretch by bringing your ear to the opposite shoulder and holding it there for 15 seconds. Repeat on both sides until the stretch feels the same.

♥ Become aware of those muscles by actively relaxing them whenever you feel the tension building. Try to draw the shoulders down towards the floor to prevent tension building up.

- ♥ Rest your baby on a pillow

or cushion when feeding so you do not have to actively hold her there for the duration of the feed. This will prevent those muscles becoming overworked and tense, which can cause a build-up of pain.

- ♥ Massage those muscles when lying on your side. With right-sided pain, lie on your right side and massage around the right shoulder blade and up into the neck using your left hand. Do this morning and evening and the tension will begin to ease.

If you see no change after a week of following this advice, or if you notice any pins and needles developing, you should be assessed by a chartered physiotherapist for some hands-on muscle release as well as some postural strengthening. ♥



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