

# Pregnancy and Back Pain

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The abdominal muscles represent a large group of muscles in front and along the sides of the abdomen. This group of 6 muscles extends from the lower ribs and attaches to the margins of the pelvis. The abdominal muscles function to maintain posture. From deep to superficial, the abdominal muscles are: the transverse abdominis, the internal obliques, the external obliques and the rectus abdominis. The abdominal muscles provide movement and support to the trunk.

The low back and pelvis need to be supported and stabilized by muscles to protect the lower back (lumbar spine) spine from being injured when performing activities of daily living especially while pregnant. The deepest layers of abdominal muscles are like a corset helping to support the abdomen during pregnancy. Contraction of the abdominal muscles helps pre-stabilize the back before any movement or activity. One of the most important abdominal muscles in the pregnancy is the transversus abdominis. (TA) Besides helping to support the pelvis and back it also helps to maintain normal intra-abdominal pressure during lifting and delivery.

It is important for women to begin developing the abdominal muscles before and during the early stages of pregnancy. This has been shown to greatly reduce the incidence and degree of low back pain during pregnancy. Women should continue to train their abdominal muscle after pregnancy to prevent back problems from. It takes at least eight to ten weeks after delivery for the abdominal muscles to effectively stabilize the pelvis and protect the spine.

The abdominal muscles are part of the core muscles. The core refers to the muscles that support the lower torso, pelvis and low back. These muscles provide stability around the body's center of gravity which lies just in front of low back and sacrum. Core stability is required to maintain balance, control posture and to walk efficiently. The term stability refers to the capacity of the body to maintain and/or return to a state of equilibrium. As the abdominal muscles become stretched during pregnancy, they become weaker. They also become more susceptible to repetitive strain and injury. The body compensates by developing movement patterns to protect the strained muscles and to restore equilibrium. This can lead to muscular tension, further injury and dysfunction of the core muscles.

The abdominal muscles may be injured during pregnancy and delivery. Surgical delivery by cesarean section requires an incision through the abdominal wall to enter the uterus. The rectus abdominis muscle may separate under the strain of the expanding uterus causing a condition referred to as diastasis recti. After delivery, supervised physical therapy is often prescribed to strengthen the abdominal defects. Occasionally surgery is needed to tighten the abdominal wall.