

# ABDOMINAL MUSCLES

It is a well-publicized statistic that 80% of us will suffer from back pain at some point in our lives. In my experience, having strong abdominal muscles is the single most important factor in preventing or rehabilitating any back injury. If the abdominals are weak, the body will rely too heavily on other muscles to support the back and stabilize the trunk. This can cause muscle strain and fatigue.

Weakened abdominal muscles also cause potential postural changes, which compromise the normal mechanics of the joints in the back. These joints can then degenerate, leading to degenerative disk disease (DDD), arthritis, and/or spurring. The disks can also break down, resulting in a disk bulge or herniation that requires surgery.

Weakened abdominal muscles also destabilize the trunk, causing hip and leg muscles to be overused, or used incorrectly, which can lead to muscle strain and fatigue in those areas. Injuries that I frequently see associated with weak abdominals are patellofemoral (knee) pain, tendonitis at the knee or hip, muscle strain of the knee or hip, bursitis at the hip, and generalized weakness of the lower extremities.

Having strong abdominal muscles is the key to preventing and treating many injuries, yet many people have had their abdominal muscles cut in necessary surgeries such as: C-section, laparoscopy, laprotomy, hysterectomy, appendectomy, colon surgery, gall bladder surgery, and the list goes on. These surgeries cut the second most important muscle in the body, next to the heart. Although necessary, surgeries which cut a muscle seriously impair its function. Even after healing, the scar tissue within a muscle decreases the ability of the muscle to generate a forceful contraction. The scar can also

be very tender to the touch, and contain lumps, (called adhesions) which are even more tender. A very little known fact is that this tenderness, even if it is unprovoked, is sending imperceptible pain signals to the spinal cord. The result is an automatic shutting off of the abdominal muscles. It is as if they are saying, "We hurt! We've been injured! Don't use us!" I have seen this phenomenon in people many, many years after their surgery. It can be the sole cause of their later injuries.

So, what is the answer? You may have needed surgery, there is no changing that, but we can change the scar tissue. Once the incision is fully healed, and the stitches or staples are removed, it is important to begin to massage the scar if the scar is already healed, but still tender to the touch, scar massage and abdominal retraining can still help. The techniques are specific to each case.

If you have a painful scar, post surgical scar adhesions or just weakened abdominal muscles our therapists can help. They can also help prevent later complications from abdominal surgery scars through the scar massage, and can retrain the abdominals to function as they should and speed your recovery.

Thank You,  
Sally Talbot, PT

**For more information on our scar massage and abdominal retraining, please call to arrange a free 15-20 minute consultation with one of our therapists. Our experienced therapists are eager to answer any questions that you may have!**



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