

No one needs to worry about 'pregnancy abs'

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Sarah Staged (2nd Right) speaking about the controversy surrounding her 'pregnancy abs' Instagram posts *Photo: Instagram*

As any self-respecting pregnant woman knows, pregnancy is not an excuse to let yourself go and look, well, you know, pregnant. But it's no longer enough to just not gain weight. Mums-to-be now must also be as cut as a serpent's tooth.

Allow me to present to you... pregnancy abs.

The 'pregnancy abs' thing began after 30-year-old lingerie model Sarah Stage started posting belfies- pregnant belly selfies- at roughly the same frequency as pregnant women need to pee. Stage's 1.2 million Instagram followers soon began following her pregnancy (and her six-pack) as closely as her obstetrician.

Initially her followers were full of praise and admiration for her tiny bump and visible abs. Some wished they looked like her when they were pregnant. Others wished they looked like Stage even when they're *not* pregnant.

"I look like this right now after eating a bowl of soup," wrote one follower of the model's barely-there belly. Even *US Cosmopolitan* appeared to be in awe, declaring: "Sarah Stage is so pregnant and so hot right now".

Bizarrely, *US Cosmo* also took the opportunity to provide other pregnant women with tips on how to get their own pregnancy six-pack.

"You can have insane abs during your pregnancy — here's how," promised one article. It's simple! All you need to do is eat small meals to "maintain the integrity of the muscles so they don't stretch"- never mind the stretching from the growing baby- and exercise regularly. And, oh yes, it helps if you have the genetics of a supermodel.

To top it off, the site even enlisted the 'expertise' of **personal trainer Franci Cohen**, who said she "went back to teaching workout classes days after giving birth to each of her four children". Hear that you lazy new mums who want to rest and recover from your pregnancy and birth?

While some gawked at Stage's tone stomach, others were quick to chime in with shaming comments. In fact, some of Stage's own followers decided they'd take it upon themselves to bring her down a peg or two.

Faster than you can say 'selfie stick', the concerned medical professionals of Instagram- also known as 'Complete Strangers With No Discernible Medical Training'- started accusing the model of causing harm to her unborn child.

"The baby is probably really small and I would imagine she will have a hard time making milk," wrote one critic. "Where's this baby hiding at? Definitely not her tummy!!" snarked another. Despite the wave of online concern, Dr Bill Bateman, who manages shared care obstetrics at the Royal Women's Hospital, says it's impossible to know if Stage was jeopardising her baby's health from an Instagram photo.

"I would think that she probably isn't, but you can't tell just by looking at someone's abdominal musculature," Dr Bateman says.

And for those who are curious about how common "pregnancy abs" are, Dr Bateman has a reassuring (if predictable) message:

'I've never seen a pregnant patient with a six-pack and that includes women who are personal trainers and gym enthusiasts," he says. "These people haven't remotely come close to a six-pack, although they probably haven't been planning to."

If there's one thing we can take away from the whole pregnancy abs episode, it's that we, as a culture, have officially reached Peak Stupid.

Both sides of the 'pregnancy abs' kerfuffle have spectacularly missed the point. The issue is not that a woman somewhere has pregnancy abs. The real issue here is that people still feel entitled to weigh in on whether there's a right and a wrong way to do pregnancy. There's not.

Every body is different. Is it really that shocking that an underwear model who's pregnant looks like an underwear model who's pregnant?

It's also not surprising that a woman who makes a living from taking photos of herself in her undies continues to do so when she's pregnant.

Sure, look at the Instagram feed if you want. But let's not turn 'pregnancy abs' into a moral or health issue. And let's not pretend that the same look is achievable for most women with some careful dieting and exercise.

But most of all, let's leave Stage's health, and that of her baby, to her and her medical professionals.