Vaginal Dilator

Your vagina may shorten and narrow after surgery or radiation treatments. Your provider may suggest that you use a non-vibrating or vibrating dilator to help keep the vagina open and flexible. Pelvic exams and intercourse can be more comfortable as a result. If you have any questions about this handout, please ask your health care team.

How Often to Use

Radiotherapy Patients: The dilator should be used daily after you are done with your radiation treatments or as instructed by your health care team. Use it for at least two years after your treatments are done. If you are not having sex, you may need to use it once or twice a week for many years. This will help to keep the vagina open and flexible. Your health care team will tell you no longer need the dilator.

Surgery Patients: If you have had pelvic surgery, wait to begin using the dilator until the wounds are healed (about 6-8 weeks). Use it for the length of time prescribed by your health care team.

How to Insert

Below are the steps for you to follow. Your health care team can help you with the placement until you feel you are able to do it by yourself.

1. Lie on your back with your knees up and apart as you would for a pelvic exam. If you are not able to place the dilator or massage wand this way, try to stand with one foot on a low stool or the side of a bathtub.

2. Use a water-soluble lubricant, like K-Y Jelly® or Oasis Silk®. This will make it easier to insert. Apply to the large end of the non-vibrating dilator or to the tapered end of the vibrating dilator. Once you are comfortable using your dilator, you may choose to use it while bathing. If you use a vibrating dilator, please make sure that it is waterproof before using in bath or shower. The water during your bath or shower may be enough lubrication. Do not use Vaseline® or other oil based lubricants because they may irritate your tissues.

3. Gently press the large end of the dilator into the vagina. Point it toward the small of your back. Insert it as far as you can without causing pain. Do not use force. The dilator should slide gently into vagina if it is has the right amount of lubricant and is inserted the right way. If it is hard to insert, try to relax your belly and pelvic muscles using slow deep breaths. This should not cause pain if done on a routine basis. If you are still unable to insert it, ask your health care team for help.

4. Once in place, keep firm hand pressure on the dilator and leave in place for 1-2 minutes. You can use a prayer, poem or song phrase to help you keep time. After 1-2 minutes, gently remove it.
5. Once you are comfortable using the dilator, push it gently in all directions inside the vagina (push left, right, up and down) to help stretch the tissue. This same movement should be used when you reach the end of the vagina and when taking the dilator out.

6. If you have been instructed to use a **vibrating dilator**:
   a. After inserting as far as possible, turn it on. Set it to a level, low or medium, that feels comfortable to you.
   b. Relax and let the wand vibrate for 3-5 minutes. If possible, do this daily. If your skin is too fragile for daily use, start with every other day. Then progress to daily use.
   c. During the 3-5 minutes, gently press the wand further into the vagina. If you have scar tissue, target that area. Press firmly, but gently. You should not have pain with this.

7. Wash your dilator with warm water after each use. Do not use soap. This can hurt your tissue. Store in a clean, dry place.

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**What Happens If . . .**

- You have slight bloody drainage or spotting from the vagina that gets worse after using the dilator? This is normal. Do not be alarmed. If you are concerned, call your health care team, but keep using the dilator.

- You have pain while using the dilator? This will not harm you. You should talk to your health care team. You may need a smaller dilator or more guidance on how to use it. Sometimes, the doctor may ask that you stop using it.

**Sexual Intercourse**

You may have sex as long as it does not cause severe pain or heavy bleeding. Lubrication with a product, such as Replens® or Oasis Silk®, may help since your tissues are likely to be dry and less elastic.
Phone Numbers

If you have any questions or problems, please be sure to call your health care team. **Monday through Friday 8:00am -4:30pm**

Radiotherapy Clinic: (608) 263-8500
Gynecology Oncology Clinic: (608) 263-7010

After hours, the phone will be answered by the paging operator. Ask for the doctor on call for the clinic. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, please call: **1-800-323-8942**.