

Vaginal Dilator Exercises

Surgery and radiation therapy to your pelvic area can cause changes or scar tissue to form in your vagina. Your vagina can become less elastic, dry and tender. Scar tissue can cause your vagina and vaginal opening to become more narrow. This problem can make it hard to have a pelvic exam and can cause discomfort during sex. Your doctor may suggest that you use a vaginal dilator to help with these changes.

What is a vaginal dilator?

A vaginal dilator is a smooth plastic or rubber tube that is about 6 inches long and comes in different sizes. It can be used to help stretch and relax the scar tissue that has formed in your vagina.

When should I start using the vaginal dilator?

You can start using your vaginal dilator 4 weeks after your last radiation treatment and after any vaginal irritation has reduced. Your doctor will talk to you about when and how often you need to use the dilator.

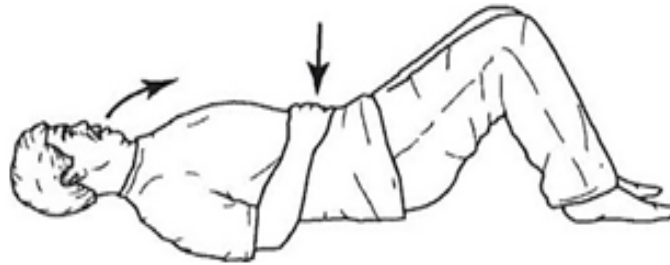
- For the first 6 months after your radiation, use the dilator 3 times each week for 10 to 20 minutes.
- Continue to use your dilator 2 to 3 times each week for 5 to 10 minutes for 2 years after you have completed radiation.

How do I use a vaginal dilator?

- Choose a time and place where you can relax and have privacy.
- Wash the dilator with soap and hot water. Rinse well before each use.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- Apply a water-based lubricant (like K-Y Jelly or Astroglide) to the dilator and the opening of your vagina. You can also use natural oils such as olive, or avocado oil but they may be hard to wash out of linens. **Do not use lotions or Vaseline products because they can cause irritation.**
- Take time to relax your body and muscles before you start. Diaphragmatic breathing, also called “belly breathing” and muscle relaxation exercises may be helpful.
 - ▶ To do Diaphragmatic Breathing:
 - Take a deep breath in (inhale), letting your rib cage widen and your abdomen expand. Keep your upper chest, neck and shoulders relaxed as you breathe in.
 - As you breathe out (exhale), allow your abdomen and chest to fall. Exhale completely.



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and slightly apart. You may also lie in a bathtub of lukewarm water. Make sure you are comfortable.
- Relax your pelvic muscles. Use belly breathing to help your muscles relax.
- Use your fingers to separate your labia (the skin outside of your vagina). Use firm, gentle pressure and put the rounded end of the dilator into your vagina. Put the dilator in as far as it will go without causing pain. Do not use force. Continue to put in the dilator until $\frac{3}{4}$ of it is inside your vagina.
- If it is hard to put in the dilator, pull it out a little, then use belly breathing and focus on relaxing your pelvic floor. Try to put in the dilator again. It may help to move the dilator in small circles when putting it into your vagina.
- Keep the dilator in place for about 10 minutes, then take it out. Put it in again 1 or 2 more times, for 10 minutes each time. Keep your muscles relaxed. If your muscles feel tense, use belly breathing and relaxation techniques.

- If your doctor or physical therapist has said it is okay, you can move the dilator against the walls of the vagina to improve tissue stretch and lessen the scar tissue.
- Gently remove the dilator and wash it with soap and hot water. Rinse well and dry. Store the dilator in a clean, dry place.

What can I expect after I start using the vaginal dilator?

It can take 8 to 12 weeks for your vaginal opening to increase in size and soften. As you get more comfortable with using the dilator, it will become easier to use.

You may have a small amount of bleeding or spotting after you use the dilator or have sexual intercourse. This bleeding or spotting is normal and should go away in a few months as your vagina starts to stretch.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Heavy bleeding or severe pain
- Constant bleeding, even if it is light
- Chills
- Temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher
- Pain in your abdomen
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Vaginal itching
- Vaginal discharge with strong odor

If you have questions, talk with your doctor or nurse. More resources are available at the OSU's Women's Behavioral Health Program. To schedule an appointment with a specialist, call 614-293-9600 and say this is a WISH (Women's Integrated Sexual Health) referral.