

Vaginal Dilator

What it is and how to use it

This handout is for patients who are having radiation treatment to the vaginal area. It explains why and how to use a vaginal dilator.

What is a vaginal dilator?

A *vaginal dilator* is a plastic tube with a rounded end that you insert into your vagina. It is used to help keep the vagina from getting too narrow.

Why do I need to use it?

If you have had *brachytherapy* or other radiation treatment to the vaginal area, scar tissue can form in the vagina. This scar tissue forms very slowly, over several months. As it forms, it makes the upper part of the vagina more narrow.

Over time, this narrowing will make sexual intercourse harder and more uncomfortable. It will also make future vaginal exams more difficult.

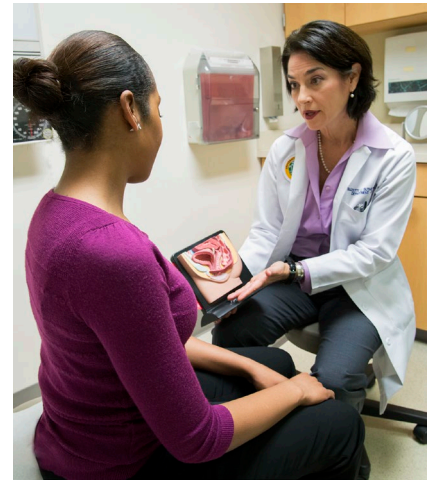
Because this narrowing happens slowly, you can keep it from becoming a problem. To do this, gently stretch your vaginal tissues **every other day**. This will help improve the *elasticity* of your vagina, so that it can expand and contract normally.

This gentle stretching can be done using one or both of these methods:

- Having sexual intercourse with penetration
- Using a vaginal dilator

To prevent narrowing in the upper part of the vagina, you must do one of these methods:

- **Every other day**
- For at least 6 months, or until your doctor says you may stop



Please talk with your provider if you have any questions about using a vaginal dilator.

Using the Dilator

- If you are **not** having sexual intercourse with penetration, use the dilator every other day.
- Some women use the dilator in the shower. Others prefer to lie down with their knees bent and apart. Do what is most comfortable for you.

Steps

Follow these steps when using the dilator:

1. Wash your hands well with soap and water.
2. Put a **water-based lubricant** such as K-Y Jelly on the rounded end of the dilator.
 - **Do NOT use oil-based lubricants like Vaseline or baby oil.** They will irritate your vagina.
 - You may want to warm the lubricant first. You can do this by placing the tube of lubricant in warm water.
3. With one hand, separate your labia.
4. With the other hand, put the rounded end of the dilator into your vagina. Using firm, gentle pressure, move it into your vagina as far as you can.
5. Keep the dilator in place for about 5 to 10 minutes the first few times you do this. Slowly increase this time until you are leaving the dilator in place for 15 to 20 minutes at each session.
6. Remove the dilator. Wash it with hot, soapy water, rinse well, and pat dry.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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