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 make your vagina and vaginal opening narrow and smaller. This problem can make it hard to have a pelvic exam and can cause discomfort during sexual intercourse (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 in your vagina.

Gentle stretching of your vagina can also be done during sexual intercourse. If you have sexual intercourse on a regular basis, you may not need to use the dilator as often.

When should I start using the vaginal dilator?

Your doctor will talk to you about how often you need to use the dilator.

- For the first month, use the dilator _______ times each week.
- During months 2 to 6, use the dilator _______ times each week.
- After 6 months, use the dilator _______ times each week.

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

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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.
- Apply a water-based lubricant (like K-Y Jelly or Astroglide) to the dilator and the opening of your vagina. Natural based oils such as olive, avocado or corn oil can also be used but 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. You may find deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises to be helpful.
- Lie on your back with your knees bent and slightly apart. You may also lay in a bathtub of lukewarm water. Make sure you are comfortable.
- Relax your pelvic muscles. Do some Kegel exercises and take deep breaths to help you relax.
  - For more information about this exercise, ask your nurse for the patient education handout, *Kegel or Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women*.
- 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.
- If it is hard to put in the dilator, pull it out a little and try a set of Kegel exercises along with deep breathing. 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, try doing gentle Kegel exercises to help your muscles relax. Try not to squeeze so hard that you push the dilator out. Continue taking slow deep breaths.
- 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 several 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 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
- Chills
- Temperature of 101 degrees Fahrenheit (38.3 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. You can get more resources 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.