Vaginal Dilator Exercises

Surgery and radiation therapy to the pelvic area can cause changes in your vagina. The vagina can become less elastic, dry and tender. Scar tissue can make the vagina and vaginal opening narrow and smaller. This problem can make it hard to have a pelvic exam and cause discomfort during sexual intercourse. 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 the vagina.

Your doctor will talk to you about how often you need to use the dilator. Gentle stretching of the vagina can also be done with 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?

Start using the dilator _____ weeks after your radiation is done.

- For the first month, use the dilator _____ times per week.
- During months 2 to 6, use the dilator_____ times per week.
- After 6 months, use the dilator _____times per 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 hot soapy water and 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 may 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.

- 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 rotate the dilator in circles when putting it into your vagina.

- Keep the dilator in place for about 10 minutes, then take it out. Put it in again one or two more times, for 10 minutes each time. Keep your muscles relaxed. If your muscles feel tense, try doing gentle Kegel exercises (don’t squeeze so hard that you push the dilator out) to help the muscles relax. Continue taking slow deep breaths.

- Gently remove the dilator and wash it with hot soapy 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 the vaginal opening to increase in size and for the tissues to 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 the 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 or fever 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.