

Vaginal Dilator Therapy Instructions

A vaginal dilator is smooth tube shaped medical device with a round end that is used to maintain and restore elasticity of the vagina. Menopause, pelvic surgery, and radiation to the pelvic area can cause your vagina to become drier, less elastic, shorter and narrower. Also women with vaginismus may benefit from using vaginal dilators. Vaginismus is an involuntary contraction, or reflex muscle tightening, of the pelvic floor. These unintentional muscle spasms generally occur when an attempt is made to insert an object (tampon, penis, speculum, or dilator). Using a vaginal dilator and or staying sexually active can help lessen these side effects and decrease discomfort during pelvic exams and sexual intercourse.

Vaginal dilator therapy is a resource you can use throughout your life. It will help with the following:

Your provider will instruct you when to start using the dilator therapy, what size dilator to start with, and what size dilator is the goal for therapy. Vaginal dilators can be purchased as a single device or in a kit of gradually increasing sizes in the **LIFE Wellness Center on the 2nd Floor at Baptist MD Anderson** or online.

In addition to dilator therapy, regularly using a vaginal moisturizer several times per week at bedtime is recommended. This will make it easier and more comfortable to stretch the tissues. When your vagina has moisture, it moves more easily.

- Allow your healthcare provider do a more thorough pelvic exam
- Make it more comfortable for you to have a pelvic exam
- Keep your pelvic floor muscles more flexible
- Keep your vagina more elastic
- Help minimize discomfort with vaginal penetration during sexual activity

Vaginal Dilator Therapy Instructions: Preparation

Select a time and place in which you can have privacy and feel relaxed. Find a relaxed position in a warm bath or on your bed. Make sure that your legs are supported and that you can easily touch the opening of your vagina. Use a hand mirror if you need it. Use pillows to support your back and legs to make it easier to relax completely.

Patient Education



Be aware of keeping your pelvic floor muscles, buttocks, legs, and abdominal muscles relaxed. Do not continue with an exercise if you cannot keep your pelvic floor muscles relaxed.

Use a good lubricant to make it easier to insert the dilator. Choose a lubricant that does not irritate your vaginal tissue. You can choose to use a water-based lubricant or coconut oil. Apply the lubricant to the dilator and to the opening of your vagina.

Inserting a vaginal dilator should not cause any pain if you do it slowly and gradually. Start with the size recommended. You may need to increase the size as your muscles and vaginal tissues stretch to build up to the desired size. Check with your therapist or provider for further information on sizing.

Practice diaphragmatic breathing for a few minutes before beginning to insert the dilator. Focus on letting your pelvic floor, buttocks and leg muscles relax. When you feel relaxed, you are ready to begin your dilator exercises.

Exercises

1. Hold the round end of your dilator at the opening of the vagina. You can use your other hand to gently separate the labia if that makes it easier to find the opening. Using very gentle pressure, slowly move the dilator into your vagina.
2. Continue to insert the dilator until you feel some slight discomfort or muscle tightness. The dilator should feel snug but not painful when you insert it into your vagina. If you feel a “wall” of resistance, do not try to force the dilator in farther. Maintain gentle pressure with the tip of the dilator and continue with diaphragmatic breathing. Gently tighten your pelvic floor muscles (Kegel) and then let the muscles relax. Repeat this several times to see if the muscles relax and the dilator slides in a bit farther. You can also try to adjust the angle of the dilator (flatter, to the right, to the left, upwards, downwards). Don’t worry if you cannot insert the dilator completely. With practice you will be able to do this.
3. Rest for 10 minutes with the dilator in your vagina. If it tends to slide out, maintain gentle pressure at the outside end of the dilator and focus on relaxing your abdominal muscles.
4. After you are done, remove the dilator and wash it with hot, soapy water. Dry it with a clean towel after each use.
5. At bedtime on the evenings you use the dilator please use vitamin E vaginal moisturizer as below.
Using a safety pin, puncture each end of a Vitamin E soft gel capsule (1000IU). Insert the entire capsule into your vagina. You can also empty another capsule onto your finger and wipe the Vitamin E on the vulva.

Vaginal Dilator General Information

- If you are prone to getting urinary tract infections (UTIs) you may want to urinate after using the dilator.
- The aim is to slowly increase to the goal size set by you and your healthcare provider. When you can insert a dilator completely into your vagina without any pain, it is time for you to start using the next larger size. The goal is to slowly increase to the goal size set by you and your healthcare provider.
- If you forget to do your dilator therapy, do not give up. Try to start again as soon as possible. Developing a plan or routine for yourself can help you be successful.
- It is not normal to have bleeding when you use the dilator. If you see a pink tinge on the dilator after using the dilator, you may need to use more lubricant the next time or work more gently. If you have frank vaginal bleeding call your healthcare provider.

Resources

- <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD007291.pub3>
Miles, T., & Johnson, N. (2014). Vaginal dilator therapy for women receiving pelvic radiotherapy. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*, 2014(9), Cd007291.
- <https://www.owenmumford.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2014/11/Dilator-Best-Practice-Guidelines.pdf>
Miles T. *International Guidelines on Vaginal Dilation after Pelvic Radiotherapy*. 1st Edition. Oxford, UK: Owen Mumford, 2012. Retrieved on February 27, 2021 from
- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ygyno.2020.09.016>
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