

HOW TO USE A VAGINAL DILATOR

After Getting Radiation to Your Pelvis

What you will find inside:

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**Waterloo Wellington
Regional Cancer Program**

Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario)

What Are Vaginal Dilators?

Vaginal dilators are smooth plastic tubes with a rounded end (like a tampon). They are about 6 inches long and come in different sizes.

Why Should I Use A Vaginal Dilator?

Radiation therapy to your pelvis can cause your vagina to become dry, short and/or narrow. You may find penetrative sexual intercourse (sex) and/or pelvic exams painful.

When starting to use a dilator choose the largest size that feels snug, but not painful.



Example of multiple sizes of vaginal dilators.

When to Use a Vaginal Dilator

You can use a vaginal dilator to prevent and reverse vaginal shrinkage (changes to your vagina) that can happen after your radiation treatment.

You should begin to use a dilator:

- 2 weeks after your **last** radiation treatment
- Once you have less vaginal soreness
- **3 times per week (every other day)** until you see your Radiation Oncologist (cancer doctor) at follow-up
- On the days you have sex, you DO NOT need to use a dilator

Note: Your Radiation Oncologist may tell you to use the dilator 2-3 times per week for the rest of your life

How to Use a Vaginal Dilator

STEP 1	Wash your hands
STEP 2	Cover the dilator with a water soluble gel like (K-Y Jelly or AstroGlide). Do not use Vaseline or oil as they may cause an infection
STEP 3	Lay on your back with your knees bent and slightly apart. You may lie in a bed or in a warm bath
STEP 4	Relax your pelvic floor muscles. Squeeze like you are trying to hold your pee in. Then relax those muscles.
STEP 5	Slowly insert the dilator into your vagina. If your vagina feels tight, hold the dilator in place while you squeeze and relax your pelvic floor muscles.
STEP 6	When your muscles relax, push the dilator further into your vagina. Repeat the squeezing and relaxing until the dilator is fully inside you. Hold the dilator in place for 10 minutes. If you find it hard to hold the dilator in place, try placing a rolled up towel against the outside of the dilator. Close your legs to hold it in place.
STEP 7	Take out the dilator and wash it with warm water and soap. Rinse it well.

What to Expect After Using a Vaginal Dilator

You may feel unsure as you begin this process. Most people find it takes some time before using a dilator feels normal. If you find it hard to use a dilator, talk to your Health Care Team.

For 2-3 months you may have a small amount of bleeding/spotting after you use a dilator or have sex. This should stop as the vagina begins to stretch. If you have heavy bleeding or increased pain contact your Health Care Team.

You can begin to have sex about 2 weeks after you have finished radiation therapy. Make sure any vaginal soreness has gone away. Having sex 2-3 times per week will help prevent vaginal shrinkage. On the days you have sex you do not need to use a dilator.

When to Call Your Health Care Team

If you have signs of an infection such as:

- Vaginal itching
- Fever
- Vaginal discharge with a strong smell
- Abdominal (belly) pain

Visit the **J. Wesley Graham Patient & Family Resource Centre** to have resources printed for you. Volunteers are there to help you find more information about your cancer, symptoms or care.

Monday-Thursday 9a.m. - 4p.m.
3rd Floor WRHN Cancer Centre, J339
info@jwesleygrahamrc.ca
519-749-4380 x2080

Use this resource for your information only. It does not replace medical advice from your doctor or other Healthcare professionals.



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