

Using a Vaginal Dilator

What is it and why is it used?

A dilator is a smooth silicone or plastic tube that you can place in your vagina. It gently stretches the tissues and gets rid of scar tissue. This can make pelvic exams and sex less painful.

During or after pelvic radiation treatments, the vagina can become shorter or thinner. Scar tissue can also form in it. These changes can be painful. Using the dilator helps prevent scar tissue and makes it easier for provider to see the area when looking for signs of cancer recurrence.

When to use a dilator

- Your doctor or nurse practitioner will tell you when to start using the dilator. Most people start using a dilator 1 month after radiation is done.
- Dilators can be used with sex to help with penetration (insertion).
- Use the dilator 3 days a week
- Keep using the dilator until your provider tells you not to. Most people use a dilator for at least 6 months.

How to use a dilator

1. Wash the dilator with warm, soapy water and rinse well before use. It should be smooth. Do not use it if you find any rough spots.
2. Start with smallest size dilator or the size your provider suggests.
3. Rub a good amount of water-soluble lubricant on the dilator and around the edges of the vagina, before you insert it. **Do not** use Vaseline, baby oil, or any type of body lotion. They are not water soluble and can bother the vagina.
4. Use the dilator wherever you are most comfortable such as the shower or bed.
5. You may use more than one position to insert it. For instance, stand with a leg raised on the side of the bed or chair or lay on your back with your knees slightly apart and bent

6. Insert the dilator using firm, gentle pressure. While inserting, slowly and gently twist or turn the dilator.
7. Insert it as deep as you can without forcing it or causing pain. Part of the dilator will stick out of your vagina. The dilator is longer than your vagina so it will not go in all the way. You should feel pressure, not pain. If the dilator is too easy to insert, try the next size up.
8. Keep the dilator in your vagina for about 5 minutes. To help break up scar tissue, gently move it from side to side and up and down during the 5 minutes.

Common Concerns

Bleeding (Spotting)

At first, you might have a small amount of bleeding (spotting) after using the dilator or after having sex. This is normal. It will stop as the vagina begins to stretch. If you have heavy bleeding, (soaking one large pad or tampon every hour), call your doctor.

Pain

If you feel pain and it does not get better after 24 hours, call your doctor.

Other key points

- Vibrators can be used in place of a dilator if they are the same size.
- Do not douche.
- The goal is to use the largest size dilator you were given. If you don't get there, it's ok, but tell your doctor or nurse if you are not at your quality-of-life goal. They may suggest other ideas that can help.

This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.