

# Dilator Instructions for Home Use

## Helpful tips

The purpose of the vaginal dilator is to help with relaxation and stretching of the pelvic floor and to reduce pain with use of tampons, physician exams and intercourse.

### What is the purpose of a vaginal dilator?

- To help with relaxation and stretching of the pelvic floor.
- To help with reducing pain with tampon use, with physician exams of pelvic floor and with intercourse.
- Do not use the dilator if:
  - » You are pregnant.
  - » You have a vaginal or urinary tract infection.
- The dilator may slide outward. Once the dilator is inserted, you may place a rolled towel between the end of the dilator and the pillow that is under your legs; this will help keep the dilator in place, so you don't have to hold it in place with your hand.
- If you are unable to insert the dilator fully, hold it at the depth you can tolerate with mild pain; relax and breathe deeply to work on muscle relaxation.
- It may also be helpful to perform some partial-strength pelvic floor muscle contractions to assist with relaxation of the muscles.
- Allow the dilator to stay in place for up to \_\_\_\_\_ minutes; remove earlier if the pain is severe. Repeat \_\_\_\_\_ times per week.

### Ideal position for dilator use

- Reclined in a tub of warm water with knees bent and legs supported.
- Reclined in bed with knees bent, head/upper body supported on pillows, and a pillow under knees so you can relax your legs.

### Method

- Place water-soluble lubricant on the tip and sides of the dilator.
- Separate the labia with one hand and insert the dilator with the other.
- Keep the pelvic floor muscles relaxed as you slowly insert the dilator.
- Pause if there is significant pain or resistance as you insert the dilator; allow the muscles time to relax.
- Continue to insert the dilator until about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the length is inside the vagina. The dilator will not fit completely into the vagina.
- When you are able to insert the dilator fully for 10 to 15 minutes, advance to the next larger size of dilator and repeat the process.
- It may help to start with the dilator size you are comfortable with and insert it for 5 minutes to allow the muscles to relax. After the 5 minutes, attempt to insert the next larger dilator size. Then proceed as the method section describes.
- Advancing from one size to the next larger size dilator varies between individuals. Sometimes progression is made in 1-week intervals, sometimes it takes 2 to 3 weeks or longer.
- Your physical therapist will help you decide when to progress to the next size dilator.
- Movement can be introduced. Hold the end of the dilator and move it slowly and gently in and out.

## Points to remember

- You are in control of the dilator. Always go at your pace.
- Always use enough lubricant for lubrication.
- Experiment with different leg or trunk positions and angles of insertion to find the best combination that is comfortable for you.
- Slow movement is generally best.

## Cleaning the dilator

- Before and after you use the dilator, wash it under running water, using mild soap.
- Do not use boiling water.
- Dry the dilator with a paper towel and store in a clean plastic bag.

## Dilator Techniques

The goal of dilation is to aid tissue in lengthening. There are various methods to achieve this goal that your physician or physical therapist will teach you. Remember that dilation should never be painful.

## Techniques

- Gradually increasing the depth of the dilator insertion
- Gentle rotation of the dilator
- Circular massage with the dilator
- Movement of the dilator: forwards, backwards, and side-to-side
- Move dilator in and out while keeping pressure on vaginal walls
- Maintain pressure on an area of discomfort for up to 60 seconds until discomfort resolves. You can change positions or angle of pressure as needed.
- Progressing to the next size of dilator
- Involve your partner in dilation therapy

If you have any questions about the above techniques, please ask your physician or physical therapist.

