

# Vaginal Dilators

## What to know after radiation therapy

### What's a vaginal dilator?

A vaginal dilator is a medically safe, smooth, plastic cylinder (tube) that can help your vagina become more elastic (stretch more easily).

### Why do I need to use a dilator?

A possible side effect of your radiation treatment is narrowing or stricture of the vagina. Over time, radiation may cause a decrease in the blood supply of the radiated area. The decreased blood supply shrinks or slows the growth of the cancer but also can lead to less elastic, drier or tender tissues in the vagina.

You may or may not notice changes. If you're sexually active, intercourse may be painful. Changes in your vagina may make it difficult to have a thorough pelvic exam.

### How does a dilator help?

Use of the dilator will keep the vagina open and the tissues more elastic.

### How often do I use the dilator?

- Begin using the dilator 4 weeks after you finish your radiation treatments.
- Use the dilator daily for 10 to 14 days, for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Then use the dilator 2 to 3 times a week, for 10 to 15 minutes.
- 6 months after your radiation treatments, use the dilator 1 to 2 times a week for 10 to 15 minutes.

Use the dilator regularly for the rest of your life to keep your vagina healthy and elastic.

### How do I use the dilator?

To use the dilator, follow these steps:

1. Wash the dilator with warm soapy water and rinse well before each use.
2. Lie down on your back with knees bent and apart.
3. Lubricate the rounded end of the dilator with water-based lubricant such as Slippery Stuff, Sliquid or Liquid Silk. K-Y Jelly can cause irritation and isn't recommended. Don't use oil-based lubricants, such as baby oil or Vaseline. Non-water soluble lubricants can irritate the vagina.
4. Separate your labia (the outside skin of your vagina). Gently and firmly insert the rounded end of the dilator into the vagina as far as possible.
5. Hold the dilator in place for 10 to 15 minutes.
6. Remove the dilator. Wash it with warm water and let air dry to prevent a buildup of bacteria.

Dilators come in different lengths and widths. Start with the largest dilator that you can keep in place without much discomfort. Over time, switch from a smaller, narrower dilator to the next larger size. Visit the shop on [vaginismus.com](https://www.vaginismus.com) to order a set of dilators.

### When do I call my doctor?

Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have:

- Questions about what size dilator to use or how to use your dilator.
- Continued pain with sexual intercourse.
- Vaginal itching, vaginal discharge with strong odor, stomach pain or fever.
- Continued bleeding or spotting.

