



# Vaginal Dilator

## Introduction

Sometimes radiotherapy treatment can damage the vaginal tissues. This can cause the vagina (front passage) to become narrower, shorter, less elastic and dryer. This may make future examinations and sexual intercourse more difficult and uncomfortable.

Using vaginal dilators may help to keep your vagina open to prevent problems for future examinations, as your consultant will want to monitor your progress. It may also enable you to resume sexual intercourse more easily if you wish to.

## What are dilators and how can they help?

During your course of radiotherapy you will be seen by either a nurse or by a radiographer who will discuss vaginal dilators with you. Dilators are a set of plastic tubes with rounded ends that usually come in different sizes which are gently inserted into the vagina. When used regularly the dilators may help to keep the vagina open by gently stretching and dilating the vaginal walls and breaking down scar tissue. A smooth shiny plastic vibrator can also be used.

## How do I use them?

- Start with using the smallest size and make sure you are in a comfortable position. Lying down is the easiest and most comfortable way
- Lubricate the dilator and vaginal opening by applying five drops of a water soluble lubricant onto the dilator and vaginal opening
- Gradually and gently introduce the dilator into the vagina, as far as is comfortable. Do not force the dilator
- Leave it in place for 5 minutes
- Gently rotate the dilator. Try to move the dilator backwards and forwards and side to side
- After using the smallest dilator for a period of time, when you feel comfortable use the next size dilator. When this is comfortable use the 3rd largest, The largest may be needed for some women to have comfortable sexual intercourse

## When do I start using them?

Try to start using the smallest dilator about 4 weeks after finishing your radiotherapy.

### How often do I need to use them?

You will need to use the dilators 3 times a week until advised otherwise by your doctor.

### What shall I do if the dilator is uncomfortable to use?

When you start to use the dilator, you may find it is uncomfortable or painful. If it is too uncomfortable, try using the dilator a few days later. You may also have some blood spotting. This can be normal but stop using the dilator and try again a few days later.

If you continue to experience discomfort or if the bleeding persists or is heavy, please contact the brachytherapy radiographers, specialist nurses in the Winfield clinic or your doctor for advice.

### Can I have sexual intercourse?

If you are sexually active, having sex following radiotherapy, this may become more difficult and uncomfortable for you and your partner.

You may not want to have sexual intercourse during radiotherapy and for at least 2–3 weeks after finishing radiotherapy to allow the area to heal and become more comfortable.

You will be able to resume intercourse whenever you wish to, but you may feel more confident if you have already used the 3rd largest size of dilator.

Dilators can be used on their own or in combination with sexual intercourse as sexual intercourse also helps to maintain keeping the vagina open.

It is recommended that the dilators are used 3 times a week and can be omitted if you have sexual intercourse on that day.

If you feel sore during sexual intercourse, you may find it helpful to use some of the lubricant or try a more comfortable sexual position.

### How do I care for the dilators?

Wash the dilators in warm soapy water and dry thoroughly.

### Are there any risks associated with using the dilators?

There are reported cases where dilation of the vagina has been linked to a risk of vaginal perforation (puncture). It is recommended that the dilators are used gently to reduce the chance of this happening.

### Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns?

Please telephone the brachytherapy radiographers (0121 371 2000 ext 15086 or 13556)

Or contact one of the nurses from the Winfield clinic (s.elkin@nhs.net) who will be happy to help.

Otherwise you can also contact your named specialist nurse at the hospital where you were originally seen.

The Radiotherapy Department Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Mindelsohn Way,  
Edgbaston Birmingham, B15 2TH  
Telephone: 0121 371 2000

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email [patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk).