Vaginal Dilator

Your vagina may shorten and narrow after surgery or radiation treatments. Your doctor may suggest that you use a non-vibrating or vibrating dilator to help keep the vagina open and flexible. This device can help make pelvic exams and sex easier. If you have any questions about this handout, please ask your health care team.

How Often to Use

Radiotherapy patients: the dilator should be used daily after you are done with your radiation treatments, or as advised by your health care team. Use it for at least two years after your treatments are done. If you are not having sex, you may need to use it once or twice a week for many years. This will help to keep the vagina open and flexible. Your health care team will tell you when you no longer need the dilator.

Surgery patients: if you have had pelvic surgery, wait to begin using the dilator until the wounds are healed (about 6-8 weeks). Use it for the length of time prescribed by your health care team.

How to Insert

Below are the steps for you to follow. Your health care team can help you with the placement until you feel you are able to do it by yourself.

Lie on your back with your knees up and apart as you would for a pelvic exam. If you are not able to place the dilator or massage wand this way, try to stand with one foot on a low stool or the side of a bathtub.

Use a water-soluble lubricant, like K-Y Jelly® or Oasis Silk®. This will make it easier to insert. Apply to the large end of the non-vibrating dilator or to the tapered end of the vibrating dilator. **Do not** use Vaseline® or other oil-based lubricants because they may irritate your tissues.

Once you are comfortable using your dilator, you may choose to use it while bathing. If you use a vibrating dilator, please make sure that it is waterproof before using in bath or shower. The water during your bath or shower may be enough lubrication.

Gently press the large end of the dilator into the vagina. Point it toward the small of your back. Insert it as far as you can without causing pain. **Do not** use force. The dilator should slide gently into vagina if it has the right amount of lubricant and is inserted the right way. If it is hard to insert, try to relax your belly and pelvic muscles using slow deep breaths. This should not cause pain if done on a routine basis. If you are still unable to insert it, ask your health care team for help.

When in place, keep firm hand pressure on the dilator and leave in place for 1-2 minutes. You can use a prayer, poem or song phrase to help you keep time. After 1-2 minutes, gently remove it.

When you are comfortable using the dilator, push it gently in all directions inside the vagina (push left, right, up and down) to help stretch the tissue. This same movement should be used when you reach the end of the vagina and when taking the dilator out.

Using a Vibrating Dilator
After inserting as far as you can, turn it on. Set on a low or medium level or what feels best. Relax and let the wand vibrate for 3-5 minutes. Do this daily, if you can. If your skin is too fragile for daily use, start with every other day. Then progress to daily use.

During the 3-5 minutes, gently press the wand further into the vagina. If you have scar tissue, target that area. Press firmly, but gently. You should not have pain with this. Wash your dilator with warm water after each use. Do not use soap. This can hurt your tissue. Store in a clean, dry place.

Sexual Intercourse
You may have sex if it does not cause severe pain or heavy bleeding. A lubricant, such as Replens® or Oasis Silk®, may help since your tissues are likely to be dry and less elastic.

When to Call
It is normal to have slight bloody drainage or spotting from the vagina that gets worse after using the dilator. Do not be alarmed. Call your health care team with your concerns but keep using the dilator.

Call if you have pain while using the dilator. You should talk to your health care team. You may need a smaller dilator or more guidance on how to use it. Sometimes, the doctor may ask that you stop using it.

Who to Call
If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan.

For a list of UW Health Clinics, visit www.uwhealth.org/.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4609.