

# *North Carolina Women's Hospital*

## **Use and Care of Your Vaginal Dilator**

### **What is a vaginal dilator?**

A vaginal dilator is a smooth plastic cylinder which helps relax scar tissue that can narrow the vagina.

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

After a woman has had radiation treatment to the pelvic area or vaginal surgery, her vagina can become smaller. If your vagina changes, sexual intercourse can become uncomfortable and it may be uncomfortable for you to have a pelvic exam.

Using a dilator will help decrease the chance that your vagina will become smaller. In addition, the vagina will be more elastic. This is important as it provides more comfort during sexual intercourse, pelvic exams and allows your doctor to see the treated area better.

### **Is sexual intercourse OK during radiation and/or after vaginal surgery?**

If you are sexually active, sexual intercourse is OK during your radiation treatment as long as you are not having problems with discomfort, bleeding or infection. If you have any questions about this, ask your doctor or nurse.

After vaginal surgery you may resume sexual intercourse when your doctor tells you the surgical area has healed.

Using a water based lubricant such as Astroglide™, K-Y Jelly™ or Replens™ and going slowly may make sexual intercourse more comfortable after vaginal surgery or during radiation treatment.

Regular sexual intercourse as often as twice a week will also dilate your vagina. If you are having sexual intercourse on a regular basis you do not need to use the dilator as often.

### **How long will I need to use a dilator?**

You should start to use the dilator after your radiation therapy has been completed and any vaginal irritation has decreased. This should be within 1-2 weeks after your radiation treatments have finished.

- For the first month, use the dilator **every day**.
- For the next six months, use the dilator **3 to 5 days per week**.

- After that, use the dilator **as needed** to keep your vagina healthy and functional.
- If you are not sexually active, use the dilator **twice a week**.

### **How do I use a dilator?**

1. Wash the dilator with warm soapy water and rinse well before use.
2. Apply a water-soluble lubricant such as K-Y jelly™, Astroglide™ or Replens™ to the rounded end of the dilator. You can buy the lubricant from a drug store without a prescription. **Do not use Vaseline™, baby oil or any type of body lotion as the lubricant as they are not water-soluble and can irritate the vagina.**
3. Lie on your back with your knees bent and apart.
4. Separate the outside skin of your vagina (labia) and with firm, gentle pressure put the rounded end of the dilator into your vagina as far as possible. Remove the dilator after 20 seconds or sooner if you have too much discomfort.
5. Repeat this several times over a 10 -15 minute period. Try to stay relaxed as this will help make it easier.
6. Wash the dilator with warm soapy water, rinse well and let dry.

### **Is bleeding or spotting normal?**

At first, you may have a small amount of bleeding or spotting after using the dilator or having intercourse. This is normal and should stop as the vagina begins to stretch. However, for some people spotting may continue for months to years after having intercourse or using the dilator. It is always a good idea to discuss this with your doctor.

### **What should I do before my follow-up visits?**

You will continue to see your doctor for regular follow-up appointments. Do not use the vaginal dilator for three days before your clinic appointment and do not have sexual intercourse for one day before your appointment. This helps your doctor to see your vagina.

### **When should I call my healthcare provider?**

- If you have heavy bleeding or you are unable to use your dilator.
- If you have painful intercourse.
- If you have any questions or concerns after you are home.

Call the Gyn Oncology clinic at 919-966-7822 between 8am and 5pm.  
On weekends and holidays call 919-966-4131 and ask for the Gyn Oncology Resident on-call.