

Vaginal Dilators

Introduction

You have been referred to the nurse specialist in out-patients to provide you with instruction and advice on how to use vaginal dilators. Vaginal dilation means stretching and opening of the vagina or vulval area. This may be required for several reasons:

1. For enjoyment of a physical relationship with your partner is an important part of well-being. Knowing your vagina can accept a dilator can help you to feel more confident.
2. To allow vaginal examination for medical reasons.
3. To allow the passage of urine to pass easily.

You may also have been referred for one of the following reasons:

- Following childbirth.
- Following radiotherapy treatment narrowing of the vagina may occur. The vagina may become dry and less elastic and this may result in discomfort and possibly cause bleeding following sexual intercourse.
- Following vaginal surgery for prolapse.
- Following vulval surgery.
- For vaginismus - a condition where the muscles of the vagina tighten and therefore sexual intercourse is difficult, painful or is unable to take place.
- Congenital problems (something you were born with).
- Post menopausal difficulties.
- As a result of a skin condition.

Any age group can be affected.

What will happen at the first visit?

- During your first visit, you will be introduced to the nurse who will be responsible for your care. At this visit to the department, time will be spent in privacy talking to you.
- Your nurse will show you a range of vaginal dilators and you will be given the opportunity to discuss matters and ask any questions regarding the use of these dilators.
- You will be seen in a room which will be free from interruption.
- Your nurse will show you how to use the dilator and will spend time instructing how to insert the dilator into your vagina.
- A vaginal/vulval inspection may be necessary.

What is a vaginal dilator?

- A vaginal dilator is a glass or plastic tube which is available in a variety of sizes.
- The length and diameter of the dilator varies.
- Your nurse will discuss the size of the dilator suitable for use by you and select a dilator which you feel comfortable with, according to your individual needs and requirements.
- Once you have finished using your dilator, it should be washed with warm soapy water, rinsed and dried thoroughly.
- You may be asked to collect a prescription from your GP to collect the Dilators; they will be in a discreet box.

Relaxation techniques

- It is advisable to be as relaxed as possible prior to, as well as whilst, using the vaginal dilator. It may help you to have a bath, listen to some relaxing music or use a hot water bottle to provide warmth.
- It is better to empty your bladder before inserting the dilator and it may help to wriggle your toes during insertion.
- It is understandable that you may have a busy lifestyle and find it difficult to make the time to use your vaginal dilator, but we do hope you manage to find some time suitable to you.
- Don't forget that relaxation can be of general benefit.

How to insert the vaginal dilator

Holding the dilator

It is advisable to familiarise yourself with handling a vaginal dilator before inserting it. Some dilators have a groove for a thumb grip. Your nurse will explain different ways to hold the dilator. The important thing is to select the way which is most comfortable for you.

Position

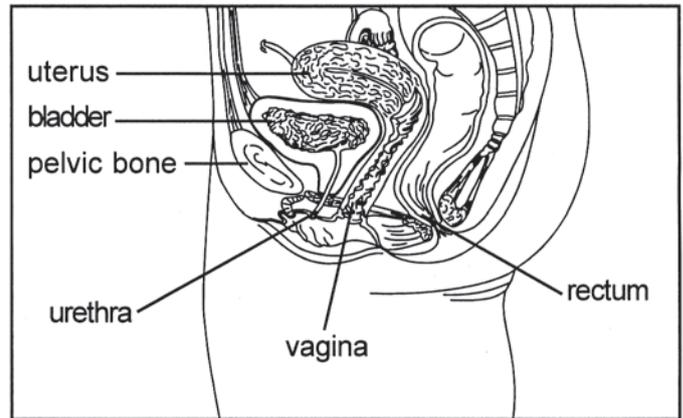
Again, this should be the position you find most comfortable. You may prefer to lie on your back or on your side. Your knees should be bent and slightly apart. It may help to straighten your legs once the dilator is in place.

Angle of insertion

It is important to be aware of the anatomy of the pelvic organs (see diagram). Please note the angle of the vagina and position of the urethra (tube which carries urine from the bladder) and rectum (back passage).

Pressure should never be applied to the front wall of the vagina. The dilator should be inserted at an angle towards the back wall. Your nurse will ensure that you are able to do this safely. Dependant on the reason for your referral, you

may not be able to insert the whole dilator. You may need to only insert the tip of the dilator at first, gradually increasing the length inserted as time goes on.



Altering size

Your nurse will advise you which size to use and when to increase the size used. Occasionally you may need to use a size smaller if a larger size becomes too uncomfortable. It is often advised to use the smaller size first before inserting the next size up each time, working up the sizes until equivalence to your partner is reached or your nurse is happy with your progress.

Lubricant

A water soluble lubricant such as Sylk or other brands should be smeared on to the rounded end of the dilator. An oil based lubricant such 'Yes' is also helpful for the post menopausal lady. The dilator should be gently inserted into your vagina, pressing it in as far as is comfortable.

Never use force when inserting the dilator. If there is difficulty in insertion, twisting the dilator as it is inserted can often help or a different size may be required. If you notice tightness when inserting the dilator, you may need to use it more often.

Timing

When to use the dilator and how long to keep it in place in your vagina will be discussed. This must respect individual needs. Ideally, we would work together towards using the dilator twice a day, for a period of up to 10 minutes each time, at times most convenient for you.

Bleeding

If you experience fresh bleeding or pain after using a dilator, please contact your nurse or GP.

You do not have to use the dilator during your monthly period but resume it as soon as possible.

Appointments and follow-up

You will be given a telephone contact number. Please try to keep in touch with your nurse so that she can monitor your progress and give advice where needed. Appointments can be made by ringing your consultant's secretary or your nurse directly.

If you do not keep in contact with your nurse, she will have a responsibility to inform your GP and discharge you from our care.

Please return any dilators no longer required to Sister Michelle Perry, Clinic 1, and Centre for Women's Health as then can be disposed of appropriately.

Additional help

When something goes wrong with a very private part of our body, we often find it difficult to talk about it. We then miss the support we would normally expect from our family and friends.

We work alongside our confidential counsellors who can see you to enable you to share your feelings and concerns.

Many women find it helpful to use this service. Sessions can be arranged for you by your nurse, or you may telephone direct.

- Nurse Specialist.....Exeter (01392) 406531
- Wynard Ward.....Exeter (01392) 406512
- Counsellors.....Exeter (01392) 406678

We hope this information leaflet has been useful to you. If you have any queries, please contact **Matron Michelle Perry** on **01392 406531**.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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