Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Instructions for Using a Vaginal Dilator During Radiation Simulation and Treatment

This information will teach you about vaginal dilators and how to use them during your radiation simulation and treatment. A vaginal dilator is a tube-shaped device that's used to gently stretch your vagina.

If you're getting radiation therapy to your pelvis, your care team may recommend using a vaginal dilator during your simulation and radiation treatments. The vaginal dilator can help move your vagina away from the tumor. This helps limit the amount of radiation that reaches your vagina.

Radiation can make your vagina narrower, shorter, less stretchy, or all 3. If that happens, vaginal penetration (putting something in your vagina) can be uncomfortable, painful, or very hard to do. This may affect your sexual activity. It can also cause problems during pelvic exams (when your healthcare provider checks your reproductive organs).

Protecting your vagina from too much radiation can help lessen these problems. It can also help improve your vaginal health and sexual function after radiation therapy.

About your vaginal dilator kit

Before you start radiation therapy, your care team will give you a vaginal dilator kit (see Figure 1). The kit will have:

- Different size dilators ranging from small (about the size of a finger) to large.
- A handle to make it easier to hold the dilator while you're using it.
- A water-based lubricant to make it easier to put the dilator into your vagina.

Figure 1. Vaginal dilator kit

How to choose your vaginal dilator size

Once you get your kit, you'll need to choose which size dilator to use during your radiation simulation and treatments. You'll do this at home.

To find the right size dilator, try each one, starting with the smallest. Read the section "How to insert your vaginal dilator" for instructions.

Slowly try bigger dilators until you find the one that feels very snug but not too tight. You should not feel pain when you put the dilator in your vagina or while it's in place. This is the size you'll use during your simulation and radiation treatments.

As you go through your radiation therapy, you may have side effects that make using your vaginal dilator uncomfortable. Tell a member of your radiation therapy team if your current dilator size starts to feel uncomfortable or painful. It's OK to switch to a smaller, more comfortable size or stop using a vaginal dilator.

How to insert your vaginal dilator

Try to pick a quiet time and comfortable space where you feel relaxed, such as your bedroom.

Relax your pelvic floor muscles and take some deep

breaths before you start. If you aren't sure which muscles are your pelvic floor muscles, read *Pelvic Floor Exercises for Females* (www.mskcc.org/pe/kegels-females).

Once you feel relaxed, follow these steps to put the dilator into your vagina.

1. Lie on your back with your feet flat on the bed or couch and your knees slightly bent.
2. Spread your legs so they're shoulder-width apart. If you have trouble doing this, you can place pillows under your knees for support.
3. Make sure you can easily touch the opening of your vagina with your hand. Use a hand mirror to see your vaginal opening if you need to.
4. Apply a water-based lubricant around the opening of your vagina and directly onto the dilator. This makes it easier to put the dilator into your vagina. You can use the lubricant included with your dilator kit or any other over-the-counter water-based lubricant, such as:

○ Good Clean Love®	○ Aquagel®
○ Aloe Cadabra®	○ Sliquid®
○ Luvena®	○ Astroglide®
○ AH! YES®	○ K-Y Jelly®

5. Using gentle pressure, slowly put the round end of the dilator into your vagina.
    - Always insert it straight toward your spine (backbone) or at a slightly downward angle, like you'd insert a tampon.
    - Never use force. Stop if you feel pain.

Always wash the vaginal dilator with soap and hot water after taking it out of your vagina. Dry it with a clean towel or paper towel.

What to expect after using your vaginal dilator

You may have a small amount of vaginal bleeding while using the dilator or after you're finished using it. This is normal. You may want to wear a panty liner after using the dilator. If you have a lot of bleeding, such as bleeding that soaks a sanitary napkin (pad), or if the bleeding continues for longer than 1 day, call your healthcare provider.

If you get urinary tract infections (UTIs) often, you may want to urinate (pee) after using your dilator.

If you have any questions or problems, talk with your healthcare provider at your next appointment.

What to expect during your simulation and radiation treatments

You must bring your dilator and handle to your radiation simulation appointment. Bring the size that felt very snug but not too tight or painful. You can leave the rest at home. After your simulation, your care team will keep your dilator and handle with your mold.

It's best if you also bring a water-based lubricant to your simulation and each of your radiation treatment appointments. This will help you insert the dilator.

You'll insert your vaginal dilator once you're on the simulation or treatment table. If you have trouble inserting it yourself, you can ask your radiation therapist for help. Remember to tell a member of your care team if the dilator is uncomfortable or painful.

The dilator will stay in place during your simulation or treatment. Once your simulation or treatment is done, you will take out the dilator before you get off the simulation or treatment table. Your radiation therapist will wash it with hot, soapy water and dry it with a clean towel or paper towel.

What to expect after finishing radiation therapy

Using vaginal dilators after radiation therapy can help improve your vaginal health and sexual function. To learn more, read *How To Use a Vaginal Dilator* (www.mskcc.org/pe/vaginal-dilator). **Talk with your care team before using a vaginal dilator after radiation therapy.**

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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