

**UROGYNÆCOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL OF WALES**

**VAGINAL DILATION**

Vaginal dilation is a way of stretching and opening the vagina and may be used for several reasons. For example; hormone changes such as the menopause can sometimes result in sexual intercourse becoming painful due to increased dryness and the vaginal tissues become thinner and less elastic. Radiation treatment, vaginal surgery and childbirth may also lead to discomfort and pain in the vagina as a result of scarring and narrowing.

Many women find vaginal dilators can be an effective aid in helping to overcome these problems. Dilators are often helpful in widening a narrow vagina without the need for surgery. Following vaginal surgery, it may sometimes be necessary to use dilators to keep the vaginal tissues healthy. They can also be used to help accustom the vaginal to light touch and gradually desensitize painful tissues so that normal sexual relationships are possible.

**What is a vaginal dilator?**

A dilator is a smooth plastic cylinder, which come in a variety of sizes and can be inserted into the vagina to stretch the tissues.

Using a dilator takes commitment, privacy and uninterrupted time. It is recommended that you use a dilator on a daily basis for 10-15 minutes. If you miss a day or several days, just restart again as soon as possible.

When using a dilator remember that you take control of the process. It may take several months of daily treatment to achieve the desired outcome. For many women continuing with insertion on a less frequent basis may be necessary long term in order to keep the vaginal area relaxed and comfortable, for others sexual relations may be enough to keep the vagina healthy.

If you are requested to attend an appointment to discuss the use of dilators the nurse will show you dilators and explain in detail how to use them and answer any questions you may have. It may be necessary assist you in inserting a dilator during your visit to check you are doing so correctly.

You will be given a pack containing dilators in a range of sizes and a bottle of vaginal lubricant to take home with you. These are discreetly packaged. If you require additional vaginal lubricant, water-based lubricants such as Sylk, Replens or Yes can be purchased in most pharmacies or supermarkets and can be used regularly to help keep the vaginal tissues moisturised.

### **How to insert a vaginal dilator:**

- Empty your bladder before using the dilator. It may also be helpful to have a warm bath or shower beforehand to aid relaxation.
- Wash the smallest size dilator in soap and water and place it in a glass of warm water. Position yourself on the bed so that you are comfortable, either on your back or side with your knees slightly bent. You can straighten your legs if you prefer once the dilator has been inserted.
- Take the warm dilator, dry it off and cover the tip with vaginal lubricant. Place a large dab of lubricant around the entrance of the vaginal opening to help reduce friction and aid insertion.
- Relax and do several pelvic floor exercises, tightening and relaxing the vaginal before you insert the dilator. When you feel ready slowly insert the tip of the dilator into the opening of your vagina. Angle the tip downwards towards your spine, as this will assist in inserting the dilator correctly.
- Insert the dilator only as far as it is comfortable, then rest. Work towards being able to keep the dilator in the vagina for 10-15 minutes.
- Do not try to push the dilator in all the way. It is designed so that part of it will stick out so that you can easily hold onto it. If you find insertion too uncomfortable try again the following day.
- Once you are comfortable with resting the smallest size dilator inside you, experiment with moving it around. The dilator is helping you slowly stretch the inner muscles of the vagina, move the dilator up and down, back and forth.
- When you feel ready progress to the next size dilator. Stay with one size as long as you need to until you feel relaxed and comfortable with insertion and movement. You need to master each size before moving to the next.
- When you are comfortable with one size, try to introduce the next size immediately after removing the smaller one, while the vaginal muscles are relaxed.
- Wash and dry the used dilator before packing it away.

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

### **Contact Telephone Numbers:**

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