

Using a Vaginal Dilator

This handout offers information on how to use a vaginal dilator. A vaginal dilator is a flexible tube with a round end. It is made of medical grade, non-allergenic, latex-free silicone. Dilators come in different sizes. Your radiation oncologist will decide what size is right for you.



Pictures of vaginal dilators.

You need to use a vaginal dilator after you have radiation treatment to your pelvis. Radiation treatment to your pelvis can cause scar tissue to form in your vagina.

This may:

- Make your vagina narrower and shorter.
- Cause your vagina to become dry.

It is important you use the vaginal dilator. Using it will help your vagina stay open for vaginal exams. It will also make sex easier for you.

How to use a vaginal dilator

1. Choose a time of the day when you feel relaxed.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Rinse the dilator under warm tap water before you use it.
4. Put water soluble gel or lubricant (for example: K-Y Jelly) on the round end of the dilator. **Do not use** Vaseline or silicone based lubricants. You may want to put the gel or lubricant around the opening of your vagina too.
5. If you are using a vaginal estrogen cream, use it instead of the water soluble gel.
6. Lie on your back with your knees bent and slightly apart.
7. Put the round end into your vagina. Do this gently.
8. Take deep breaths as you put the dilator in until you reach the top of your vagina. Stop if you feel pain.
9. Hold the dilator in place for 3 minutes and apply gentle pressure. If it is hard for you to hold, put a rolled up towel against the end of the dilator and close your legs. This should keep the dilator in place.
10. Take the dilator out after 3 minutes.
11. Wash the dilator with mild soap and tap water. Rinse and place upright to let air dry. Keep it in a clean dry place. The dilator does not need to be sterile.
12. Wash your hands.

When to use a vaginal dilator

Start to use the dilator 4 weeks after your radiation treatment ends. Use the dilator 3 times a week for 3 minutes each time. Keep doing this until your next follow up appointment with the radiation oncologist. You need to keep using the dilator until your radiation oncologist tells you to stop.

What to expect after using a vaginal dilator

You may have a small amount of bleeding or spotting the first few times you use the dilator. You may also have spotting after you use the dilator or after sex for a couple of months. This is normal.

If you:	You will need to:
Have bleeding that is bright red in colour or you are soaking 1 pad in an hour.	Go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you.
Have a lot of pain in your pelvic area.	Call your primary nurse or radiation oncologist. Call CareChart Digital Health after-hours, on weekends and holidays.
Cannot put the dilator in.	Call your primary nurse or radiation oncologist. Call CareChart Digital Health after-hours, on weekends and holidays.
Have signs of an infection: • Vaginal itching • A fever above 38.3° C/100.9°F at any time or above 38.0° C/100.4°F for more than an hour • Vaginal discharge with a strong odour or abdominal pain	Call your primary nurse or radiation oncologist or see your family doctor/nurse practitioner.

If you have a problem or concern about a symptom or side effect from your cancer treatment:

1. Call your primary nurse at the cancer centre from Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4 pm, (except on holidays). Use the phone number your primary nurse gave you.
2. Contact CareChart Digital Health from Monday to Friday, 4 pm to 8:30 am and anytime on weekends and holidays for after-hours symptom management support.

Talk to a nurse using one of these options:

- Call the after-hours telephone line at 1-877-681-3057.
- Request a video call by going to carechart.ca.
- Use the CareChart Digital Health App. This App is available to download for iOS or Android devices.

Call 911 or go to the emergency department at the hospital closest to you for a medical emergency. Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any of the information in this handout.

Last reviewed: April 2025