

How to use a Vaginal Dilator after Radiation Treatment

A Patient Information Guide

In this guide you will learn about:

- Vaginal dilators
- Reasons to use a vaginal dilator
- When to use a dilator
- When and where you can buy a dilator
- Who to call with questions



Sunnybrook

ODETTE CANCER CENTRE

A Cancer Care Ontario Partner

What is a vaginal dilator?

- A vaginal dilator is a firm tube with a rounded end which is used to prevent or manage the narrowing or shortening of the vagina
- It is placed into the vagina
- It may be made of plastic or silicone
- Some are solid and some are hollow.
- Dilators come in many sizes

Serensil® Vaginal Dilators (Silicone Vaginal Exerciser)



*\$150 - \$160 per set of 6 pieces
\$15 - \$57 per piece (depends on the size)*

Silk Silicone



\$35 - \$48 per piece

Why do I need to use a vaginal dilator?

- Cancer treatments like surgery and radiation may shorten or narrow the vagina or cause vaginal tissue to become thin
- Chemotherapy, surgery or radiation can mean you have lower levels of estrogen. This can make vaginal tissues thin, dry and less elastic
- These changes can cause discomfort in your vagina
- If you use a vaginal dilator it can help stop scar tissue from forming, increase blood flow, and help heal the top of the vagina.
- If your vagina has already narrowed a vaginal dilator can help to break down scar tissue and open the vagina.
- If you are worried or concerned about using a vaginal dilator please speak to your health care team.

If you had an exenteration surgery and vaginal reconstruction (a new vagina was created after your surgery), please ask your surgeon for information on how you should use a dilator.

Most of the information in this booklet is for people who have had radiation and may not be right for people who have had vaginal reconstruction.



When do I use the dilator?

- Start using the dilator about 2 weeks after your radiation has stopped
- It is important to use the dilator every day for the first 2 months after you have finished your radiation treatment.

Keeping the vagina open is important for you to:

- Have a more comfortable pelvic exam
- Enjoy sexual activity and intercourse

How do I use the dilator?

1. Find a quiet time of the day when you are relaxed and will not be disturbed.
2. Wash your hands and the dilator with warm unscented soapy water.
3. Lubricate the dilator with the water-soluble gel such as Muko or K-Y jelly. Make sure the lubricant covers all the areas of the dilator that will go inside the vagina. You may also put water-soluble lubricant into the opening of your vagina.



Tips: Do not use Vaseline or other oil-based products. They are not water-soluble and may cause infection. They can also ruin silicone dilators.


4. Lie on your back with your knees bent and apart. Relax.
5. With one hand, spread your labia (the folds of skin at the opening of the vagina).
6. Take a deep breath. Slowly blow out and begin inserting the dilator with your other hand. Blowing out will help relax your pelvic muscles.
7. Keep the dilator in place. Wait for a moment and take a deep breath and as you blow out, gently push the dilator further in to the vagina.
8. Do this a few times until you feel it is in as far as it can go.
9. Keep a bit of pressure on the dilator so that it continues to push to the very top of your vagina.
10. Once the dilator is in as far as it can go, try to gently wiggle it side to side and up and down.
11. If you have pain, stop and try again the next day.
12. Hold the dilator in place for about 1-2 minutes.
13. Take the dilator out of the vagina.

Tips: If you find it hard to hold the dilator in place for 1-2 minutes, roll up a towel, place it against the end of the dilator and close your legs. You can also choose to buy a dilator with a handle (such as the Vaginismus Vaginal Dilator).



After you use the dilator

- Wash the dilator with soapy water to wash off any lubricant. Rinse well. Air dry and store in a clean dry place. Wash your hands.
- It is normal to bleed a little bit or have some spotting after you use the dilator. You may have spotting after you use the dilator and after intercourse for a couple of months.



Tips: If your dilator kit has different sizes of dilators, start with the small dilator. If it goes in easily and does not cause any pain you can use the larger size next time.

How often should I use the dilator?

- It is best to use the dilator for 1-2 minutes every day for 2 months, then use the dilator for 1-2 minutes, two times a week for six months.
- After you have used the dilator for 6 months you can talk to your health care team about how many times you should use the dilator.

When can I start having sexual intercourse?

- You can have sexual intercourse 2 weeks after your internal radiation ends, as long as you do not have a lot of bleeding or pain.
- You do not need to use the dilator if you have intercourse that day.
- If you stop having regular sexual intercourse (or any other penetration into the vagina), it is important to begin to use the dilator if you need to get regular vaginal (pelvic) exams.
- Talk to your sexual partner about changes and side-effects you have. It is important that you feel comfortable when having sexual intercourse.

When do I need to call my health care team?

You should call your health care team if you have:

- A moderate amount of bleeding.
 - The blood may soak through a few pads, but it is not fast or out of control.
- A lot of pain
- You cannot put the dilator in.
- Signs of an infection like vaginal itching, fever, vaginal discharge with a strong odor or abdominal pain.

Important: Go to your nearest emergency department if you have bright red bleeding or heavy bleeding that is soaking 1 pad in an hour.



When should I buy a dilator?

- It is important to buy the dilator and water soluble lubricant before you finish your radiation treatment.
- Your healthcare team will tell you about the different choices and suggest the right size.

Millex® Vaginal-Hymenal Silicone Dilators



\$84.89 per piece

Vaginismus®



\$ 44.95 - \$67.45 per set

Berman® Dilator Set



\$ 50 per set

Tantus Silk®



*\$30.98 – \$54.79 per piece
(depends on the size)*

Did you know?

Private insurance may cover the cost of your dilator. If you have private insurance coverage, please contact your oncologist or social worker. They will give you a prescription or a letter that you can give to your private insurance company.

If you cannot afford to buy a dilator or lubricants, please tell your health care team. We may be able to help you.



Where can I buy a dilator?

If you would like to buy your dilator online, try searching with these words:

- Vaginal Exerciser
- Vaginal Dilators
- Silk
- Tantus

➤ **Come as You Are**

- Call 416.504.7934
- Comeasyouare.com

➤ **Odette Cancer Centre Pharmacy**

- T-Wing, First Floor
- 416-480-4671

➤ **Lovecraft**

- Call 416.923.7331 for home delivery
- Lovecraftsexshop.com

➤ **Vaginismus®**

- Vaginismus.com

➤ **Good For Her**

- Call 416.588.0900 for home delivery
- Goodforher.com

For more information on dilators:

- **Odette Cancer Centre Sexual Health and Recovery (SHARE) Clinic**
 - Website: <http://sunnybrook.ca/SHARE>
 - Phone: 416.480.5000 Ext. 81022

- **Sunnybrook Your Health Matters**
 - <http://health.sunnybrook.ca/>

- **Patient Education and Research Learning (PEARL) Centre**
 - 1st floor of the Odette Cancer Centre
 - Phone: 416.480.4535
 - Email: patienteducation@sunnybrook.ca

- **Canadian Cancer Society**
 - www.cancer.ca

- **American Cancer Society**
 - www.cancer.org
Search for > Sexuality for the – Woman with Cancer

Who can I call with questions, concerns, or to report side effects?

Please call: Gyne Nursing Team at 416.480.5000
Ext. 81076



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