

## Arden Cancer Centre

# Vaginal dilators

Radiotherapy to the pelvis in women can lead to narrowing and shortening of the vagina. The vagina may also become dry and lose some of its natural elasticity. Surgery and radiation-induced menopause or natural menopause can intensify the symptoms.

This may cause problems in the future during vaginal examinations or vaginal intercourse. For this reason, your consultant has advised you to use vaginal dilators.

The dilators will help keep the vaginal muscles supple and prevent the vaginal walls from becoming stuck together. This should make pelvic examinations and vaginal intercourse easier.

## What are vaginal dilators?

Vaginal dilators are smooth, cylindrical-shaped plastic tubes. They come in a range of sizes which allow for gentle progression as you get used to the dilators.

The tubes are easy to place into the vagina. They come with a twist-lock handle and a tube of lubricating gel supplied in a cosmetic bag.

More supplies of gel are available from your GP on prescription. Or you can use any water-based lubricant.



## Patient Information

### **When you should use the dilators**

Start using the dilators between 2 and 8 weeks after you finish radiotherapy.

### **How to use the dilators**

Start with the smallest size dilator.

1. Slot a clean dilator into the handle. Apply some of the lubricating gel onto the dilator.
2. Find a comfortable position, such as lying on your bed or standing with one foot resting on a chair.
3. Separate your labia (vaginal lips). Gently place the rounded end of the dilator into the vagina (only the white part, not the handle).
4. Using gentle pressure, move the dilator up into the vagina by rotating the handle clockwise. Rotate the handle until you have gone in as far as is comfortable for you. Do not use the dilators with force.
5. Leave the dilator in place for 1 minute or until your pelvic floor feels relaxed.
6. Gently rotate the dilator and pull slowly until it's nearly out. Then, reinsert it again.

If this is comfortable, progress to the next size. Gradually increase the size of dilator so that you feel a gentle stretch. You may not be able to use all of the dilators.

Repeat this for 2 minutes at least 2 to 3 times a week.

When you have finished, remove the dilator. Wash the dilator and the handle in warm soapy water, and then rinse and dry well.

Sometimes there can be a spot of blood on the dilator. Do not worry about this.

If you experience any soreness, heavy bleeding, or pain, stop using the dilator and contact us for advice.

## Patient Information

Dilation therapy may also include the use of vibrators or fingers. It may not be needed if vaginal intercourse is resumed weekly (or more) after treatment.

Continue with dilation on a regular basis. This may be for at least 12 months or longer after treatment. Your consultant can advise you about this at your follow-up appointments.

You may find these animated videos helpful:

For the Care dilator: <https://www.owenmumford.com/en/medical-devices/sexual-health/amielle-care>

For the Comfort dilator: <https://www.owenmumford.com/en/medical-devices/sexual-health/amielle-comfort>

## Pelvic floor exercises

You can use the dilators together with pelvic floor exercises.

Relax your pelvic floor muscles whilst moving the dilator around. Practise gripping the dilator with your pelvic floor muscles.

You can ask specialist radiographer or nurse for an information sheet on how to perform pelvic floor exercises.

## Vaginal intercourse

If you wish to have vaginal intercourse during treatment, discuss this with your oncologist, specialist radiographer or nurse. You may not need to use dilators if you have vaginal intercourse at least once a week.

You may notice some slight bleeding after intercourse or when you remove the dilator. This is nothing to worry about.

If the bleeding becomes heavy or lasts a long time, please contact us for advice.

## Patient Information

### **Further information or support: -**

Macmillan information and support radiographers: 02476 96 7290.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 7290 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

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Document History	
Department:	Arden Cancer Centre
Contact:	27290
Updated:	February 2024
Review:	February 2026
Version:	10
Reference:	HIC/LFT/949/09