

VAGINAL DILATOR BASICS FOR PAIN



This handout is not for post-surgical pain. The techniques for different surgeries, vaginoplasty, or cancer treatments may be different than these instructions.

Dilators can be a powerful tool in your rehabilitation process. Dilators facilitate your brain and vagina to work together, achieving the best results. The goal is to allow “opening” of the vagina without strain or pain.

Dilators are appropriate for you if the thought of vaginal touch or penetration makes your heart race and your anxiety flare. Actually experiencing pain, may confirm fear and places your nervous system on higher alert. Awareness of how your body is reacting can make a large difference in your dilator experience.

GETTING STARTED:

- Wash dilators with soap and water.
- See positioning image (right).
- Place a liberal amount of lubricant (water-based) on the smallest dilator.
- Allow the tip of the dilator to touch the outer labia and gradually move toward the vaginal opening. Check in with yourself. Are you relaxed?
- If you're relaxed, slowly slide the tip into your vaginal opening. Pause. Continue to slowly insert the dilator as long as your pain only increases 1-2 points on the 0-10 scale.
- If discomfort or pain increase, breathe - letting your belly and chest rise. If helpful, you may also squeeze-then-relax your pelvic floor muscles to relax further. You are in control.
- You may keep the dilator still and breathe, rock your pelvis. or gently move the dilator in and out.
- When one size becomes easy, move up to the next size with the same, gradual steps. It may take minutes or months.
- Each session should start with a size that is consistently not challenging (or the smallest size).
- Frequency: 3-7 x week, for 10-20 min (or as your therapists instructs)



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Try positioning yourself reclined with your knees bent and legs supported and relaxed. Sidelying positions may work as well. The important part is that you can relax and reach your vagina without straining.

DILATOR SELECTION:



Talk to your healthcare professional about the best type for you. Factors to consider:

- How small do you need the smallest one to be?
- Would a harder (glass or plastic) or a softer, more flexible texture (silicone) be more useful for you?
- What sort of dexterity do you have? Do you want an extended handle, a loop, or a suction cup base?
- Will you want something that can be used in a harness?
- What is your price range?

VAGINAL DILATOR TIPS FOR SUCCESS



TECHNICAL TIPS:

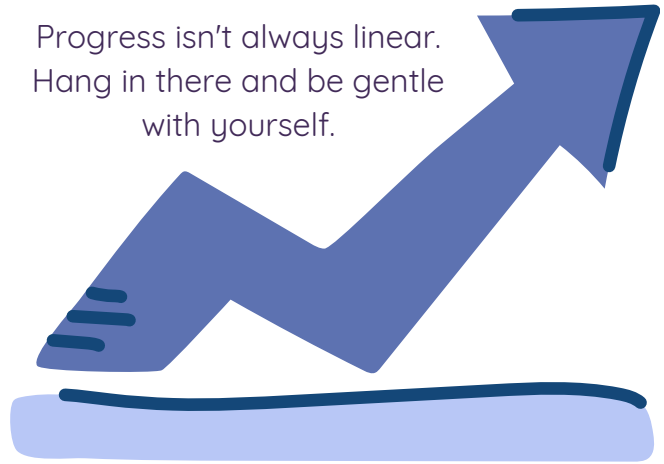
- Dilators can be used at home or you can receive help from a qualified pelvic therapist.
- Create a relaxing environment.
- Different positions may help you relax more. Having your body as relaxed as possible is a good way to start.
- There are a variety of goals with dilators. You may want to insert a tampon or have a speculum exam without pain. You may want to have enjoyable sex with a finger, penis, or dildo. You can train for the size you need.
- Discuss muscle relaxers or lidocaine with your physician if you're having difficulty relaxing.
- Do not use dilators if you have or suspect you have an active vaginal infection or have unusual symptoms; or if you have pain that does not subside after using the dilators.



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Relaxed on your back with your legs supported works well for some. Sidelying works well for others. The important part is that you can allow your body to relax and not have to strain to reach your vagina.

Progress isn't always linear.
Hang in there and be gentle
with yourself.



ALSO NOTEWORTHY:



- You may have times of frustration but there's a lot of hope!
- Start using dilators on your own. Make sure that YOU feel comfortable without any pressure from a partner. Some people like to eventually add in a partner but it does not have to be part of the process.
- Use imagery of yourself using the dilator. Direct your thoughts in a positive way. Imagine yourself without stress, anxiety or pain with the dilator.
- For sexual goals of any kind, focusing on curiosity, play, and connection with yourself or with a partner is so helpful.
- Sex therapists can be helpful in breaking through sexual barriers.

USING VAGINAL DILATORS WITH PARTNERS



Should I use this with my partner?

Dilators can be used:

- Completely separate from partners
- Therapeutically with partners (Steps 1-2)
- As a transition from therapeutic to sexual with self or with partners (Steps 1-6)

Each step can be its own experience and may be repeated as many times as needed.

Step 1: Have a partner in the room with you but not as part of the dilator use.

Step 2: When you're comfortable with a dilator (of any size), allow your partner to have their hand on the handle of it and guide them in how to move it.

Step 3: When you have established trust in how your partner handles the dilator and you feel as if your communication is effective, you may choose to shift to a more sexual energy. Start with YOU being in control of the dilator while your partner touches you in a sensual or sexual way somewhere other than your genitals.

Step 4: If desired, allow your partner to control the dilator in a sexual way. Use your pre-discussed words, sounds, and hand signals to communicate.

Step 5: Consider building up to the dilator that is close to a comparable size to your penetration goal (a penis? a finger?) but you may not need to go that far. If using a harness, consider the size of the bases for the dilators for fitting.

Step 6: If penile penetration is the goal, it still needs to be a gradual progression. Start with fingers or smaller toys/dilators first. Next, penile insertion with no movement. Then, penile insertion with movement with clear communication. Set a time limit - maybe 1 minute to start, then progress gradually as comfortable. Plan on doing non-penetrative activities as a large part of the experience.

Communication is key!



Before: Be sure to discuss the process and plan how you will communicate and what the expectations are.



During: Follow the plan you made. Use the communication tools you established.



After: Discuss what went well and what changes you might make for the next time.