

# Vaginal dilators

After your course of radiotherapy you may experience vaginal dryness and stenosis (narrowing of the vagina) this can make sexual intercourse and future vaginal examinations difficult or uncomfortable

## Things to help

- Moisturisers
- Lubricants
- Vaginal dilation
- Vibrators

## Lubricants and Moisturisers

There are several different types available, you can get these from your chemist or prescribed by you GP or nurse specialist.

Lubricants	Moisturisers
KY jelly	Hydromol
Aqua gel	E45
Sylk	
Hyalofemme	
Multi-Gyn Actigel	
Pjur med glide	

## What are vaginal dilators?

They are smooth round ended plastic tubes, which come in four sizes and have a handle to attach.

Using dilators may help to reduce scar tissue and stretch the vagina, helping to retain its elasticity and keep the vagina supple.



## How do I use the dilators?

We advise that you start using the dilators during your treatment. We will advise you on technique when you start your radiotherapy.

- Always wash your dilators in warm soapy water and dry well before using
- Start with the smallest dilator fitting the handle before using
- Wash your hands well and put a small amount of lubricant onto the dilator
- Get into a comfortable position and try to relax
- Gently insert the rounded end of the dilator into your vagina as far as it will go.
- Move the dilator in a circular motion (about five minutes) whilst using your pelvic floor muscles to grip the dilator.
- When you feel comfortable using the dilator move to the next size.
- When you have finished withdraw the dilator gently pushing it in and out and from side to side.
- Always wash your dilators in warm soapy water and dry well after each use.
- Repeat three to four times a week.

## Vibrators

These can be used in addition or instead of dilators. They should be used in a similar way to the dilators and the same care should be applied to them.

## Is it safe to have intercourse?

- It is normal to be anxious about resuming intercourse. Sexual intercourse after radiotherapy is safe. It will not make the cancer return.
- Radiotherapy can make your vagina more sensitive, sore and dry; lubricant can make intercourse more comfortable.
- You may experience some light bleeding after intercourse, this is normal. Any heavy bleeding should be reported to your GP or your cancer nurse specialist.
- It is normal to feel tired after radiotherapy, so you may not feel like intercourse. If this continues for many months please discuss with your doctor or nurse specialist.



## Vaginal dilation

To help prevent narrowing of the vagina, you may want to consider vaginal dilation. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

- **Dilators**
- **Vibrators**
- **Sexual intercourse**

Before you finish your radiotherapy treatment a radiographer or specialist nurse will discuss vaginal dilators and lubrication, you will be given the option to have a set. Some people are hesitant to consider using a dilator. Please discuss any issues you may have with the radiographer or specialist nurse.

## Do's and don'ts for using dilators

- ✓ **Do** wash the dilators before and after every use
- ✓ **Do** wash your hands before and after
- ✓ **Do** use lubrication every time
- ✓ **Do** start with the smallest dilator
- ✓ **Do** change to a smaller dilator if having any difficulty
- ✓ **Do** use vaginal massage if having difficulty with smallest dilator
  
- ✗ **Don't** feel pressured into using the dilators
- ✗ **Don't** use force when inserting the dilator



## Radiotherapy department contact details

Telephone: 01225 824853

Monday-Friday 8am-3:30pm

Website: [www.ruh.nhs.uk/patients/services/radiotherapy](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/patients/services/radiotherapy)

## Other useful phone numbers/websites

Bath RUH cancer information centre: (01225) 82 4049

Macmillan: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)  
08088 080000

**CNS** - Tracie Miles (01225) 82 1553

**Life after cancer** PocketMedic® have produced some patient information videos, available at [www.medic.video/swe15-cancer](http://www.medic.video/swe15-cancer) (Life after cancer)

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Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email [ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656.