



Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service  
Division of Gynaecology

## PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

# VAGINAL DILATION

## WHAT ARE VAGINAL DILATORS?

Vaginal dilators are used to help stretch vaginal tissue whether this be to widen or lengthen the tissue. Vaginal dilators are plastic or silicone rods/cylinders that have a rounded or pointed ends and are available in different sizes starting from small to larger length and widths.



## WHY ARE DILATORS RECOMMENDED?

Vaginal dilators are recommended for women who are having difficulty with penetrative sex.

Vaginal dilators can be recommended due to a variety of reasons such as:

- Surgery, due to the vagina not being fully formed at birth such as Rokitansky syndrome (also known as Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser [MRKH] Syndrome)
- Vaginismus where the vaginal muscles tighten automatically making penetration difficult
- Vaginal stenosis where there is a narrowing, shortening or tightening of the vaginal canal, often caused by scar tissue build up
- Side effect of radiotherapy from cancer treatment.
- Improve elasticity and reduce pain due to menopause

Vaginal dilators can be used to encourage vaginal sensation and action, along with creating extra vaginal length by stretching the vagina to enable women to have penetrative sex. Vaginal dilation is often used in a combination with other treatments, medications and lubricants and there is evidence of excellent success rates for women who use vaginal dilators. Individuals have found vaginal dilators have helped with their gender and sexual identity.

It is important to start your vaginal therapy when you feel ready both physically and emotionally. You will be guided and supported throughout the process by an Advanced Clinical Practitioner.

## DO I HAVE TO USE DILATORS?

In some conditions such as Rokitansky syndrome, surgical options are available; however, they are not without risks and can be painful. For those women who choose to have surgery, use of vaginal dilators is still required afterwards to prevent scarring and keep the vagina open. Without dilators the vagina is likely to shorten or close after surgery. For other conditions, vaginal dilations are the only option available.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I START MY TREATMENT?

You will be seen in clinic by an Advanced Clinical Practitioner who will discuss your symptoms followed by an explanation about your anatomy. A vaginal examination will be required to assess how stretchy your vaginal tissue is to help create a treatment plan.

It is important to try and feel as relaxed as possible before using the dilators therefore relaxation techniques will be discussed during your appointment.

To ensure vaginal dilation progress is occurring, you will be taught how to examine yourself. We will also show you the correct angle of insertion and right amount of pressure to use, to stretch your vagina fully.

A full explanation of how to use the dilators will occur during your appointment along with the various types of dilators available. The hospital usually provides either Amielle dilators or Femmax dilators however there is an option to buy other plastic or silicone type dilators. You will be involved in the planning of your care from the beginning, and we will work together to decide what suits you best.

The vaginal dilation process is taken slowly and starts with a small dilator, gradually increasing the size of the dilator. There are various lubricants available to help ease with the process and these will be discussed with you.

There is no set time frame for using the dilators. Some women are very keen to achieve vaginal capacity quickly and therefore will choose to use the dilators for 5-10 minutes three times a day – for others they may want to know how to do it but don't feel ready yet or wish to take it slower

You will be reviewed regularly in clinic to assess progress and receive support and advice on when to progress on to the larger dilators until you have completed your treatment and can enjoy comfortable sex with or without a partner.

## HOW LONG DOES THE DILATOR TREATMENT TAKE?

The length of treatment depends on the individual and the reason for using vaginal dilation. On average, if the dilators are regularly used, it usually takes around four to six months to elongate the vagina. Once you are able to be sexually active the vagina will remain fully stretched so there is no need to continue using the dilators. It may be useful to use dilators again if you have not had sex for a while or need to increase the length of your vagina. Some prefer to use natural dilation through sexual intercourse and others may use a combination of natural dilatation and sexual intercourse to stretch their vagina. Our team are available to discuss these options with you.

## WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO START USING DILATORS?

This is an individual decision. Every person is different and will make the decision when they feel ready, depending on their circumstances. This may be influenced by a person's readiness to have penetrative sex, how they feel about their diagnosis, and/or to help with fertility treatment. Some people decide not to proceed with dilator treatment at all.

## ARE THERE ANY CHALLENGES TO VAGINAL DILATION?

### Discomfort and pain

Initially, you may need close supervision and guidance on using the dilators. Although we use a lubricating gel, you may still have some discomfort especially when initially using the dilators. This is normal as the vaginal skin is being stretched. It should settle however mild analgesia such as paracetamol may help reduce discomfort and burning sensation. Sometimes you may experience pain during sex after vaginal dilator treatment which may be due to dryness or the lack of lubrication. Using extra lubricant may be helpful.

### Bleeding

You may have a small amount of vaginal bleeding at the start of your treatment, either on the dilator or as light staining of your underwear. This is usually due to a slight tearing of the vaginal skin and is not serious but please mention this at your next appointment or contact the Advanced Clinical Practitioner if you have more than light bleeding.

### Urinary symptoms

Most people feel the need to pass urine urgently when they first start using the dilators. This is because the vagina and urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside the body) are quite close to each other. When the vaginal space is stretched you may feel some pressure near the bladder or the urethra. This sensation usually settles after a few days when the vagina becomes more stretched. It is helpful to let us know if you have a history of urinary symptoms, any problems, or urine infections. If you have any pain when passing urine, it is important to contact your GP, as you may have an infection and need antibiotics.

### Emotional

Using dilators can be emotionally challenging. Many of our patients would like emotional support with the process, therefore please discuss this with your Advanced Clinical Practitioner who can arrange for you to see our clinical psychologist.

If you have any concerns regarding any of the above, you can contact your Advanced Clinical Practitioner to discuss further.

## HOW TO USE VAGINAL DILATORS

You will be supported by your hospital team to help you understand the process of vaginal dilation and how to use your dilators effectively. During your first hospital appointment, you will be given a set of dilators.

Please note, it can take 3-6 months or longer for the vagina to become sufficiently stretched. It is important to understand this and to allow sufficient time to achieve the desired result. If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact your team

Here are some tips to help the process of dilation:

- Ensure that you have privacy and plenty of time. It is useful if you plan ahead of time when you are going to dilate. Make sure you are somewhere private, where there is no risk of being disturbed or you will not be relaxed enough to use your dilators properly.
- Choose the correct size of dilator as recommended by your hospital team.
- Apply some KY jelly (or other lubricant approved by your medical team) to the tip of the dilator.
- Find a comfortable position with your legs apart and your knees bent.
- Separate your labia (vaginal lips) and feel the entrance of the vagina with your finger (a mirror may help).
- Applying firm, gentle pressure, insert the dilator slowly into your vagina, pointing towards your lower back.
- At first, it may help to push the dilator as far in as is comfortable, rotate it gently and pull it back a little before pushing it further in again. Repeat this a few times.
- Once the dilator is in as far as comfortably possible, and whilst maintaining firm pressure on the dilator, it should be held in place for 20-30 minutes.
- After using your dilator, wash it with mild soap and warm water and dry.
- You may find it useful to record each session in a diary to chart your progress.

You may have a little bleeding as the vagina is stretched. This is normal and nothing to worry about. However, if you are concerned, please contact your doctor for advice.

## WHEN WILL PENETRATIVE SEX TO BE POSSIBLE?

It may be possible for you to try and have penetrative sex when you have started using the medium size dilators. Having penetrative sex also helps stretch the vagina, however, it may take a little time for the vagina to reach its required length. In the meantime, you should continue to use the dilators regularly and we will advise you when to progress on to a larger size. You may choose to wait until you have completed your treatment before you have sex. Your Advanced Clinical Practitioner will discuss this further with you. It is important that you do not feel coerced into having sexual intercourse too early when you do not feel ready. If you have any concerns, please speak to your Advanced Clinical Practitioner.

## CLEANING THE DILATORS

When you have finished using the dilators, wash them in the same soap that you would use to wash your genital area, rinse well and dry well. Do not sterilise the dilator as this can damage the silicone/plastic.

## WILL I NEED TO USE PROTECTION WHEN I HAVE SEX?

Yes. It is always advisable to practice safe sex because you are still at risk of sexually transmitted diseases and blood-borne diseases such as HIV or Hepatitis B.

## IS CERIVCAL SCREENING REQUIRED?



INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE

disability  
confident

If you still have a cervix, yes you will still require cervical screening.

If you do not have a cervix, i.e. individuals with Rokitansky Syndrome, you will not require cervical screening.

## CONTACT DETAILS



**Karen Donnelly**

Advanced Care Practitioner

0161 276 8714

If you require any further information or clarification, including clarification of terminology, please do not hesitate to talk to one of the doctors or nurses, who will be happy to discuss your concerns with you.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Saint Mary's Hospital Patient Information Leaflet:**

**Rokitansky Syndrome:**

*Insert link to Rokitansky leaflet when live.*

**BritSPAG:**

<https://britspag.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Vaginal-Dilation-Top-Ten-Tips.pdf>

**MRKHCONNECT:**

<https://mrkhconnect.co.uk/what-is-mrkh/>