

USING YOUR VAGINAL DILATORS

There are many reasons that women may need to use a vaginal dilator or trainer. Some of the conditions or reasons dilator use may be recommended by your health professional are:

- vaginismus
- vulvodynia, vestibulitis
- pelvic pain
- after radiation treatment for gynaecology cancers
- pudendal neuralgia
- dyspareunia or painful intercourse (this can be due to many reasons, some women experience difficulty with their first attempts at penetrative sex, some may develop difficulties at times of low oestrogen such as after childbirth or menopause)
- difficulty having a gynaecology examination (eg Pap smear)
- unable to insert tampons
- lichen sclerosus, lichen planus
- male to female gender reassignment surgery

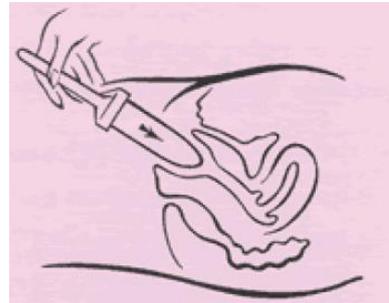
They are best used under the guidance of a qualified health professional and in conjunction with other techniques such as relaxation, pelvic floor muscle down-training , stretching and sometimes counselling.

The goals for using them can include:

- assisting you to successfully have pain-free penetrative intercourse
- helping you to have vaginal examinations with a speculum by your health professional
- maintaining or regaining vaginal elasticity following radiation therapy
- reduce pain from pelvic floor muscles which may be tight or sensitive.
- to gradually teach your brain that insertion can be pain-free and thus break the cycle of fear and pain. Your brain's natural response to something which causes pain is to stop it happening - in this case by tightening the muscles surrounding the vaginal opening .

SOME HELPFUL HINTS

- pick a time when you will not be disturbed and you won't be in a hurry.
- be kind to yourself, the process of progressing through the sizes can take a while and you may feel that you have ups and downs along the way.
- try having a warm bath or shower before you start
- use in a comfortable place where you feel secure and relaxed and do some breathing exercises and stretching before starting
- the initial goal is for you to feel comfortable with inserting them before trying with a partner. You can progress to your partner helping you to insert the dilator either prior to, or instead of, penetrative sex.
- take your time , do not pressure yourself or let someone pressure you
- remember that you will be gently stretching muscles surrounding the vagina - similar to stretching any other muscle group. However the vaginal muscles form a ring around the vaginal opening so imagine them opening up , rather than stretching in length.
- also remember that fear of pain can cause more pain - so your goal is to be successful without pain in order to show your brain that your vagina can relax and stretch without pain. Discomfort level whilst using them shouldn't exceed 3-4/10.
- use plenty of lubrication - on the dilator as well as your vulva and opening to the vagina (introitus) . A natural lubricant like SYLK or YES do not have irritating preservatives in them and are available from our online store. do not use soaps or perfumes on delicate vulva tissues as this too can be irritating.
- if your brain expects pain , it may well send pain messages to your vagina , causing the muscles to contract and prevent any penetration.
- try to visualize yourself successfully inserting a dilator. Imagine yourself doing so calmly and without pain



USING YOUR VAGINAL DILATORS OR TRAINERS.

- At any stage of practise, if you are having trouble or experience pain, try taking a slow deep breath in through the nose, expanding your ribs, out through the mouth. This helps you to focus your thoughts and release calming hormones into your system to counteract the stress hormones of cortisol and adrenaline which will make you tense up.
- Always start with the smallest dilator - even if you had progressed to larger ones in your previous session. You can never stretch as far at the start of a yoga class as at the end so don't expect to jump straight in to the larger size.
- Use plenty of water-based lubricant
- Gently place the dilator tip on the vulva, at the opening to the vagina without trying to insert and get used to the sensation of it being there
- Do a few pelvic floor contractions and let them go. Exhale to tighten , inhale to let go
- Gently bear down and insert the smallest size, with gentle pressure. Never use force, do not think of pushing or inserting - think more that the vagina is allowing the dilator to enter.
- Continue inserting until you feel discomfort or muscle tension, stop , take another deep breath. If it is uncomfortable , don't pull it out immediately as this may cause more pain instead try to do some gentle relaxed breathing to give the vaginal tissues and muscles time to accommodate to the gentle stretch.
- Try to keep it there for a few minutes.
- Once it feels more comfortable you can try to gently pull it out part way then insert again, gently moving the dilator within the vagina.
- You can also try rotating the dilator in a circular motion starting small and gradually a bit larger
- once you can comfortably use a size , it is time to try the next size.
- Gently remove dilator and wash in warm soapy water ready for storing for your next session.
- It is normal to sometimes experience a small amount of bleeding when using dilators however if you experience bleeding which soaks a pad or is of any concern please cease treatment and call your doctor.
- If you are prone to UTI's , urinate immediately after dilator use and follow strict toilet hygiene of wiping front to back.

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