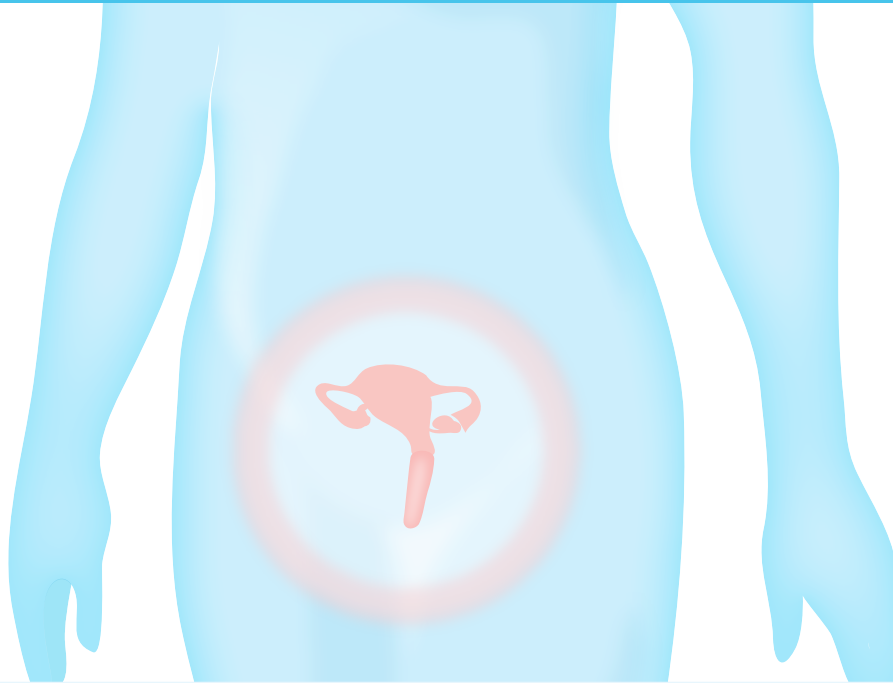




# Your Step-by-Step Guide to Vaginal Dilation



This booklet will describe vaginal dilation. It will cover what this is, the benefits of doing this, how to do this, and when to seek help. Your health care team will discuss vaginal dilation with you also and explain what it means for you.



## Acknowledgements

### Authors

Joanne Power  
Joanne Alfieri  
Luisa Luciani Castiglia

### Collaborators

MUHC Gynecologic Oncology Interdisciplinary Team  
MUHC Radiation Oncology Nursing

### Special Thanks

We would like to thank  
the MUHC Patient Education Network Committee  
for supporting the translation and printing of this booklet,  
and the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO)  
Vaginal Dilation Working Group, for allowing us to use  
their work in developing this booklet.

We would like to thank the MUHC Patient Education Office for their support throughout the development of this material, including the writing, the design, layout, as well as for the creation of all the images.

© Copyright 25 May 2018, McGill University Health Centre.  
This document is copyrighted. Reproduction in whole or in part without express written permission from [patienteducation@muhc.mcgill.ca](mailto:patienteducation@muhc.mcgill.ca) is strictly prohibited.

Please note: The MUHC reserves copyright on all our materials (our material, images, content). We grant you permission to use, share or distribute, but they cannot be modified or reproduced (partially or totally) .This is strictly prohibited.



### **IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ**

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes.  
It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care.  
Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



This material is also available through the MUHC Patient Education Office website:  
[www.muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca)

# Table of Contents

- 1** Introduction
- 2** Vaginal stenosis after treatment
  - What is this?
  - How I can prevent or treat this?
- 3** About vaginal dilation
  - 3** How will it help?
  - 4** Why is this important to do?
  - 4** When do I start?
  - 5** How often should I dilate?
  - 5** Do I need to dilate if I am having sexual penetration/ intercourse?
  - 5** Where will I do it?
  - 6** What will I need?
- 8** Step-by-step guide to vaginal dilation
  - 8** How to do it
  - 10** How it will feel
- 11** When to call your health care team
- 11** How to reach us
- 12** Looking for more information?
- 13** Calendar
- 14** Notes

## Introduction

This booklet will cover important information about vaginal dilation, why you may need to do this, how to do it, and when to seek help.

Research has shown that, by doing vaginal dilation, you will help prevent or treat any vaginal narrowing that can develop after radiotherapy treatment or surgery.

Use this booklet as a guide once you are at home. Speak to us if you have questions or concerns. We hope that this booklet will help. We will also be there to guide you each step of the way.

Your Gynecology/Oncology team  
McGill University Health Centre



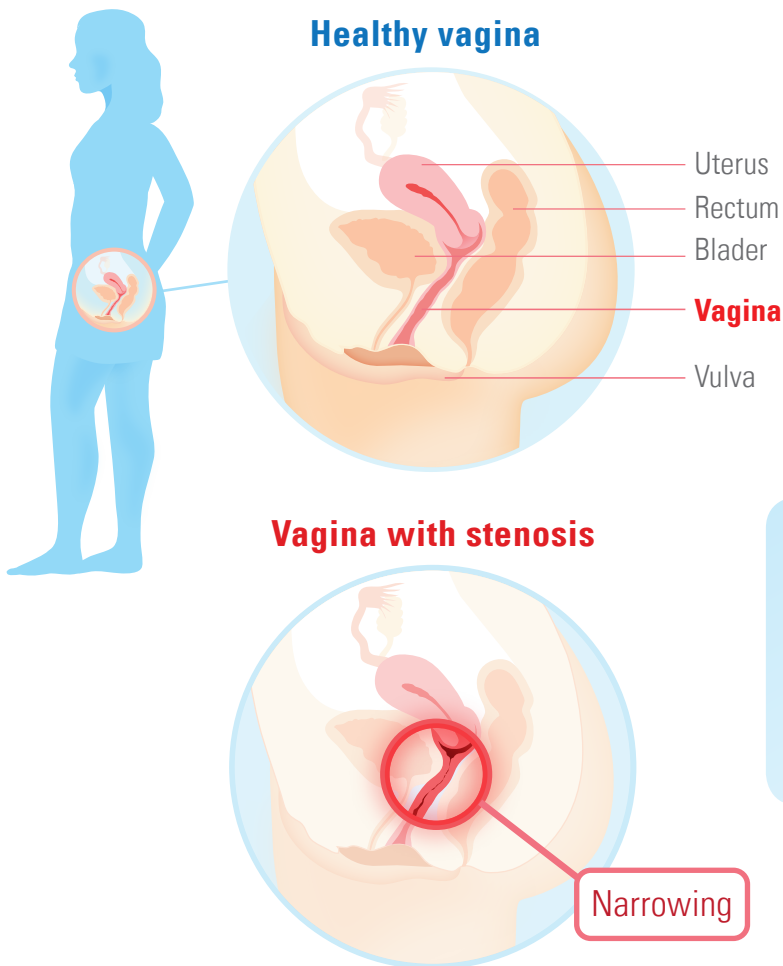
# Vaginal Stenosis after Treatment

## What is this?

Scarring in the vagina can sometimes happen after you have had:

1. radiation therapy of the pelvis (that is, around the hip area), and/or
2. gynecological surgery

These treatments can lead to a build-up of scar tissue. When this causes the vagina to tighten or become narrow, we call it **vaginal stenosis**. Along with narrowing, your vagina may feel drier and more rigid (less elastic).



### Did you know?

You may only notice these changes months to years after your treatments have ended.

## How can I prevent or treat this?

The good news is that you can prevent vaginal stenosis. This can be done by a process called **vaginal dilation**. If you already have vaginal stenosis, vaginal dilation will help to improve this.

### Did you know?

Vaginal dilation is something you will do at home. Your health care team will explain how you will do this. The information is also covered in this booklet.

## About Vaginal Dilation

### How will it help?

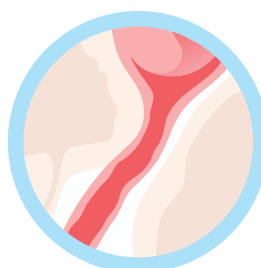
**Vaginal dilation** will help keep the walls (**lining**) of your vagina from sticking together. It will gently stretch your vagina over time to keep it open.

If you need it, your doctor may also prescribe you a hormonal cream. This will also help to increase elasticity and strengthen your vagina.

Prevention of stenosis



Treatment of stenosis



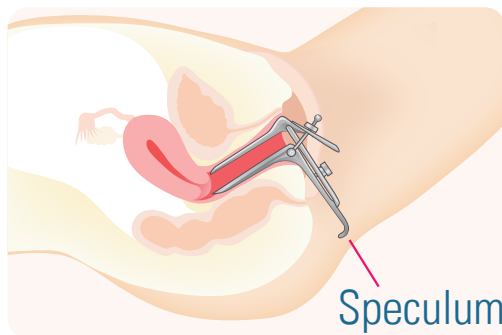
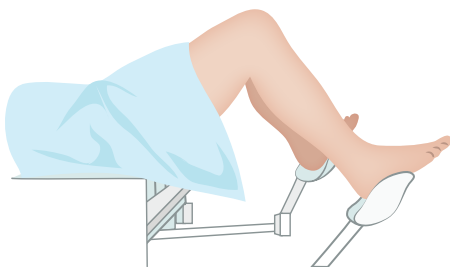
After  
vaginal dilation

## Why is this important to do?

There are important benefits to doing vaginal dilation. These include:

1. A more comfortable **vaginal exam**. Having this regular check up with your gynecology doctor is important to detect any health problems.

### Vaginal exam



2. More comfort during during **sexual penetration** (that is, when inserting a penis, fingers, vibrators or sex toys into the vagina). Dilation will help to restore the flexibility and functioning of your vagina.

## When do I start?

If you have had **radiotherapy**, you should start dilating 2 weeks after your radiotherapy treatments have ended. If you feel sore, wait another week or two, until there is less soreness or irritation.

If you have **not** had radiotherapy, you should start dilating as soon as your health care team advises you that you may begin.



## How often should I dilate?

Ideally, you should do this once a day, especially for the first 3 months. However, at the very least, dilate 2 times a week. Some people find it easier to remember to dilate if they choose the same days of the week to do it each week. If you forget or miss a day, don't worry. Start dilating again once you remember.

The more often you do this, the better the results will be! Speak to your health care team if you have questions about stopping vaginal dilation



**See page 13 for a 12-week calendar to help keep track of your dilation.**

## Do I need to dilate if I am having sexual penetration/intercourse?

Some women may need dilation less often or might even be able to stop, if they are having intercourse (or some form of vaginal penetration) at least twice per week. If sexual penetration is uncomfortable, using a lubricant prior to penetration may help to make it more comfortable

However, you should start dilating again if:

1. Penetration becomes uncomfortable, or
2. You stop having regular sexual intercourse (or other vaginal penetration)

## Where will I do it?

Choose a time and a private place where you feel most relaxed. Many women find their bedroom to be the most comfortable place to do this.

## What will I need?

Before you begin, assemble the following materials:

1. **Vaginal lubricant**

(do not use petroleum jelly e.g. Vaseline)

2. **Vaginal dilator**

This is a firm, smooth tube, made of plastic, rubber, or silicone.

3. **A towel**, to place on the bed  
(if you plan to insert in this position).



You will also need access to warm water and unscented soap for washing.



### Vaginal Lubricant: Did you know?

There are 3 types of vaginal lubricants: water-based, oil-based, and silicone-based. Some examples are KY Jelly, Astroglide, or even olive oil.

One brand of lubricant may irritate (burn, sting) but another brand may feel fine. You may need to try a few different brands and types of lubricants before finding one that is right for you.

## Vaginal Dilator: What size is right for you?

**Dilators** come in different sizes and go into the vagina just like a tampon.

Your doctor will prescribe you the specific size that you will need. Some women may start with a small size and with time need to use a bigger size. Ask your doctor about increasing the size of the dilator if you feel the dilator easily inserts into the vagina without any stretching or light pressure

Your nurse will give you a dilator and teach you about how to use it when she meets with you.



**0.75 inch**  
**2 cm**



**1 inch**  
**2.5 cm**

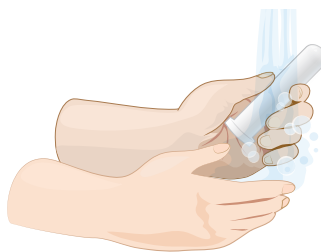


**1.5 inch**  
**3.75 cm**

# Step-by-Step Guide to Vaginal Dilation

## How to do it

- 1** Wash your hands and the dilator with warm, soapy water. Use an unscented soap. Rinse well.



- 2** Place yourself in a comfortable position. You can:

Lie on a towel in bed. Bend your knees



Sit on the toilet or a chair with your legs spread open



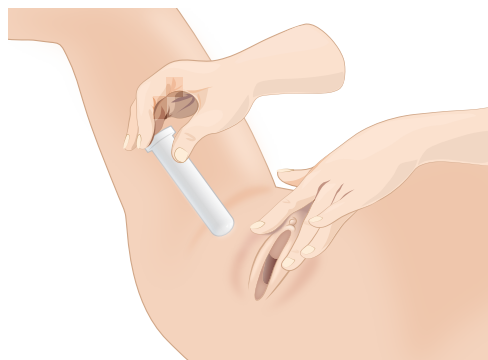
Stand with one foot up on a step or the toilet.



- 3** Apply the lubricant to your dilator. Make sure the lubricant covers all the parts which will go inside you.



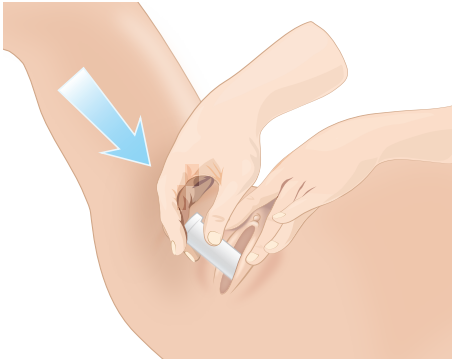
- 4** Spread the skin on both sides of your vagina with one hand. With your dominant hand, hold the dilator at the opening of your vagina.



- 5** Take some slow, deep breaths to help relax your pelvic muscles.

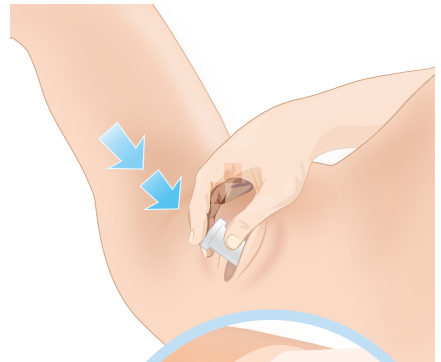


- 6** Slowly insert the dilator into your vagina. As you do, point the dilator toward your lower back. If you need to, stop and take a breath, before you continue. Gently push it further inside of you until you feel it can't go any further.



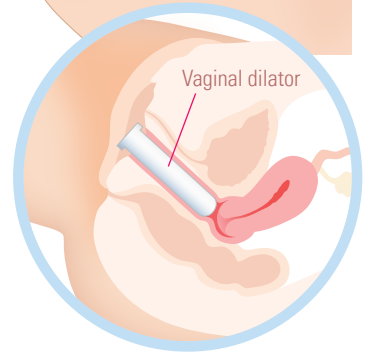
- 7** **Never force the dilator inside your vagina. Always direct it where it goes in most naturally. Stop, if you feel a lot of pain**

Keep a gentle pressure on the dilator so that it pushes against the very top of your vagina.



- 8** Keep the dilator in your vagina for at least 3 to 5 minutes.

**After you have used the dilator a few times, you can gently push it in further and keep it in for longer, up to 10 minutes.**



- 9** Remove the dilator. Wash the dilator and your hands with warm soapy water.



How will it feel?

You may feel a little uncomfortable at the beginning. As you insert the dilator you should feel some stretching and light pressure.

You may also:

- 1. Feel a little burning or stinging.
- 2. Notice a small amount of bleeding.

This is normal. You will feel more comfortable with time. If the discomfort continues, speak with your health care team.



## When to Call Your Health Care Team

### Call your nurse or doctor, if you notice:

- More than a small amount of bleeding (enough that you need to use a sanitary pad.)
- A new or severe pain when inserting the dilator and/or after you take out the dilator
- Menstrual/period like cramps
- New itching in the vulva area
- An unfamiliar liquid coming from your vagina
- A new unpleasant smell or odour from your vagina



**Do not wait. These changes may be a sign of an infection or another health problem.**

If you are finding it difficult to do vaginal dilation, or if you have other questions or concerns, please let us know. We are here to help.

## How to Reach Us

Radiation Oncology Nursing 514-934-1934 ext.43400  
Monday-Friday 8:00am - 4:00pm

# Looking for information on **CANCER**?



Search: Cedar Cancer Guides  
Chemotherapy  
PICC & Portacath  
Radiotherapy  
Pain control  
Cancer and fertility



Visit the Patient Education Collection  
[muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://muhcpatienteducation.ca)



Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill



McGill University  
Health Centre

Office d'éducation des patients  
Patient Education Office



# 12 Weeks Calendar

example

Mon	Tue ✓	Wed	Thu	Fri ✓	Sat	Sun ✓
-----	-------	-----	-----	-------	-----	-------

Week  
1

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
2

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
3

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
4

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
5

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
6

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
7

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
8

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
9

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
10

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
11

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Week  
12

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.