

## Patient Information

### Use of vaginal dilators following Pelvic Radiotherapy/ Brachytherapy

Your Consultant, Radiographer or Clinical Nurse Specialist may recommend that you use vaginal dilators after completing a course of radiotherapy to the pelvis and / or internal brachytherapy.

Radiotherapy and sometimes surgery can potentially cause long term side effects to the vagina. Radiotherapy / Brachytherapy can cause the walls of the vagina to stick together (called adhesions) this may cause a narrowing or shortening of the vaginal wall. Radiotherapy can also reduce natural vaginal lubrication causing vaginal dryness, irritation, and soreness.

We therefore recommend using vaginal dilators to help break down any adhesions that may form from your treatment and reduce the risk of scarring within the vagina. Whether you are sexually active or not, using the dilators to maintain the form of the vaginal will:

- Reduce potential long-term discomfort that vaginal scarring can cause.
- Allow the medical team to examine you internally without causing discomfort as part of your ongoing care.
- Ensure sexual relations can continue or recommence after treatment.
- Reduce the incidence of discomfort or painful intercourse.
- Will reduce potential difficulties for penetrative sexual intercourse with future sexual partners if you are not in a sexually active relationship at the present.

#### When do I start using dilators?

We recommend that you start using the vaginal dilators 2 weeks after your last radiotherapy / brachytherapy treatment. If when you start using the dilators it is too painful, stop and try again in a week's time. We would expect you to be routinely using the vaginal dilators by the time you attend for your first follow-up appointment.

#### How often do I need to use the dilators?

There are currently various opinions on using vaginal dilators. At this NHS trust we recommend that you use a dilator 3-4 times a week for the foreseeable future or until advised otherwise by your doctor.

#### Using the dilator

- Dilators are smooth, plastic tubes which can be put into your vagina to gently stretch the tissue.

- They come in different sizes, it is recommended that you start with the smallest dilator within the pack and progress to a larger size in the days/weeks following treatment, as is comfortable.
- We recommend that you find a private and comfortable place where you can relax and use the dilators. The dilators can be used in the shower or the bath if this provides privacy, and / or allows you to relax your pelvic floor muscles therefore allowing dilator use to be more successful.
- They are for your use only.
- Place a water-soluble lubricant, such as 'Aqua gel™' on the rounded end of the dilator and around the entrance to the vagina prior to insertion.
- There are various positions in which to use the dilator: we recommend that you either lie down on your back with knees slightly apart and bent or stand with a leg raised and resting on something to insert the dilator as you would insert a tampon.
- Using firm gentle pressure, insert the dilator into the vagina as gently and as deeply as is comfortable. Do not force the dilator.
- Once the dilator is inside the vagina gently move the dilator forward and back, then left to right. Use a circular motion as you remove the dilator.
- Repeat this several times for approximately 5-10 minutes, encouraging pelvic floor exercises during insertion.
- After use, remove the dilators, wash by hand with soapy warm water, rinse well and dry. Vibrators may also be used in conjunction with the use of dilators.
- If applicable, your partner may be encouraged to be involved.
- If you have any spotting or slight bleeding, do not be alarmed. This blood loss is due to the breakdown of scar tissue and is not likely to last very long.
- You should not experience any discomfort or heavy bleeding when using the dilator.

If you have any concerns regarding the information in this leaflet or about your treatment, please contact:

Advanced Radiographer Brachytherapy (Gynaecology): Monday – Friday 7.30am to 5.30pm **01603 646749** or  
 Macmillan Information and Support Radiographer (Answer phone available to leave message): **01603 289705**.

