



VAGINAL DILATOR BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

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INTRODUCTION:

If you are experiencing fear and anxiety about the possibility of pain or if you currently have pain with attempts at touch or penetration, you are not alone. This can happen for many reasons. This handout provides an approach to using dilators that is based on the principles of how the brain and vagina work together.

You may actually feel symptoms of what is called a "fight, flight or freeze" response. With attempts at touch or insertion at the vagina, your heart may race, you may get even more anxious; and if you experience pain, then that reinforces your expectation and can snowball your brain's "danger response". The success rate is higher when we make sure the brain is on board with the training.

GETTING STARTED:

- Position yourself reclined with your knees bent and legs supported
- Place a liberal amount of lubricant (water-soluble) all over the smallest dilator
- Allow the tip of the dilator to touch your vulva (labia and around the vaginal opening). Can you stay relaxed?
- Once you feel relaxed with the dilator on your vulva, slowly slide the tip into your vaginal opening. Pause. If you experience NO GREATER than 3/10 discomfort (not necessarily pain), continue to slowly insert the dilator.
- If your discomfort or pain level increases, practice belly breathing or squeeze-then-relax your pelvic floor muscles and allow your body to relax again to see if the discomfort decreases.

- Allow the dilator to stay in place for 10 minutes to communicate to your brain that the danger/threat level is low. This has an effect that becomes cumulative during the time you use the dilators.
- Continue with this size until you feel comfortable with moving up. Then start with these same steps on the next size up.

DILATOR SELECTION:

Talk to your healthcare professional about the best type for you. Factors to consider:

- How small do you need the smallest one to be? Different sets have different starter sizes.
- Do you need a harder dilator (glass or plastic) to also use for some intentional stretching of muscles (separate from dilation)? Or do you need a softer, more flexible texture (silicone)?
- What sort of dexterity do you have? Do you want an extended handle, a loop, or a suction cup to put it on a surface?
- What's your price range?



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TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Other medical diagnoses should be ruled out.
- Be good to yourself through this process. You may have times of frustration but there's a lot of hope! You are not "broken".
- Dilators can be used at home or you can receive help from a qualified pelvic physical therapist.
- Create a relaxing environment.
- Start using dilators on your own. Make sure that YOU feel comfortable without any outside pressure. Even a loving partner may inadvertently increase your fear or anxiety.
- Use imagery of yourself using the dilator. Picture how you feel direct your thoughts in a positive way. Imagine yourself without stress, anxiety or pain with the dilator.
- Prescribed vaginal creams or topical ointments may assist with the process.
- Do not use dilators if you have or suspect you have an active vaginal infection or have unusual symptoms; or if you have pain that does not subside after using the dilators.
- Discuss muscle relaxers or lidocaine with your physician.
- Different positions may help you relax more.
- Remember, sex is more than penis-in-vagina intercourse. Focusing on curiosity, play (that doesn't involve vaginal penetration), and connection with a partner is so helpful.

ADDING A PARTNER:

**Commit to communication before, during and after the dilator experience*

Step 1: Have a partner in the room with you but not part of the dilator use.

Step 2: When you're comfortable with a dilator (can be any size), allow your partner to have their hand on the handle of it and guide them in how to move it

Step 3: When you have established trust in how your partner handles the dilator and you feel as if your communication around it works well for you, shift the energy to a more sexual energy. Start with being in control of the dilator while your partner begins something that is NON-GENITAL but sensual or sexual.

Step 4: Allow your partner to control the dilator in a sexual way. Use word, sounds, hand signals to communicate... But have that type of communication pre-planned to avoid confusion.

Step 5: If penile penetration is desired, build up to the dilator that a comparable size to the penis that will be penetrating.

Step 6: If a penis will be doing the penetrating, it still needs to be a gradual progression. Start with penile insertion ONLY and no movement. Progress to penile insertion with movement with clear communication. Set a time limit - maybe 1 minute to start, then progress gradually as comfortable.

You will still need to continue dilation 2x/week while you're re-integrating into partnered sex.