

# Suggestions for Using Vaginal Dilators

by Wendy Maltz, author of *The Sexual Healing Journey*

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Many women find vaginal dilators to be an effective medical aid in helping them overcome sexual problems, such as vaginal atrophy, painful intercourse, and fear of penetration. They can assist therapeutic programs designed to heal sexual problems caused by past sexual abuse.

Vaginal dilators are durable plastic tube-shaped devices. They come in a variety of styles and range in size progressively from extra-small, small, and medium, to large and extra-large. Vaginal dilators allow women to slowly stretch the muscles in their vagina and desensitize their emotional and physical reactions. Over time a woman can build confidence in her ability to enjoy vaginal penetration during lovemaking.

Here are some general suggestions for how to use vaginal dilators in a sexual healing program. Consult with your physician, physical therapist, or sex therapist to make sure that these suggestions conform to your health status and the individual treatment program recommended for you.

At first, most women feel a little embarrassed and anxious about using the dilators. You can reduce anxiety by spending additional time becoming familiar with them before you actually start to use them in treatment. You may want to take the smallest size dilator out of its box and examine it. Notice it is made of a hard, smooth white plastic. Move it back and forth between your hands, wave it in the air, rest it on your body, or hold it in your lap for a few minutes. Feel free to rename your dilators. Because of how effective they can be in treatment, some women and their partners call them, "miracle tubes."

## **Suggestions for inserting vaginal dilators:**

1. Wash the smallest size dilator with soap and hot water. Then place it in a glass of hot water by your bedside to keep it warm. Take a hot, relaxing bath. Dry off and sit back on your bed, reclining on soft pillows.

2. Take the warm dilator, dry it off, and cover the tip with a personal lubricant. Place a large dab of lubricant over your vaginal opening.
3. Relax, and breathe fully and steadily. Do a few Kegel exercises to tighten and relax your vaginal opening. When you feel ready, slowly insert the tip of the dilator into the opening of your vagina. Angle the tip downwards, towards your tailbone, as this will help steer the dilator comfortably in, under, and around your pubic bone. Insert the dilator only as far as you want to, then rest and continue with relaxation techniques to keep yourself calm and your vaginal muscles loose.
4. Work towards being able to insert the dilator 3-4 inches inside you and rest it there for about 20 minutes a day, every day. The more regularly and routinely you do the insertion, the easier it will become. Do not try to push the dilator in all the way. It is designed so that part of it will stick out so you can easily hold on to it.
5. Once you are comfortable with resting the smallest size dilator inside you, experiment with moving it around. Remember, the dilator is helping you slowly stretch the inner muscles of your vagina. Move the dilator up and down, back and forth.
6. Repeat this exercise with the smallest size dilator for at least one week. When you feel ready, progress to the next size dilator. Stay with one size dilator as long as you need to until you feel relaxed and comfortable with insertion and movement. You master each size before moving on to the next.
7. Continue the exercises until you have mastered the largest size dilator. Then, you can repeat the exercises guiding your partner's hand as your partner inserts the dilators and moves them around. Eventually, with

your partner's cooperation, you can continue the exercises using your partner's penis or fingers.

Using vaginal dilators takes time and commitment. To protect against boredom, feel free to combine dilator insertion with another relaxing activity, such as, reading a book, watching TV, or listening to music. If you can only find 10 minutes a day to do the exercises, that's better than nothing. If you skip a day or several days, just start in again as soon as possible. One woman likened the process of treatment with a dilator to using a shoe stretcher to increase the size of tight shoes -- with either one, you need to get it in and give it plenty of time to work.

In using vaginal dilators, remember that you control the process. You determine when, where, how, and for how long you will do an exercise. To facilitate transitions, you may want to shift down to an easier size for a longer period of time or shift from one size to another slowly during the same 20-minute period. Treatment with vaginal dilators usually takes several months if a woman is using the dilators daily. Follow-up insertion on a less frequent basis may be necessary to keep the vaginal muscles loosened.

### **Positive thinking**

If you reach a block in inserting a particular size dilator, use relaxation, breathing, imagery, and creative problem solving to help. For example, rather than think of the dilator as penetrating you, imagine that you are enveloping it. Some women like to fantasize that the dilator is connected to their intimate partner and that, as the dilator rests inside, they are giving their lover an internal hug.

Changing your thinking can be a powerful tool in helping relax muscles in the vagina. When you imagine the inside of your vagina, what do you picture? If you see it as a hard little tunnel with a thick steel door, you will approach treatment process differently than if you see it as a warm, moist, earthy nook with soft moss and lovely flowers, or a smooth and stretching balloon capable of expanding many times its size.

## **Genital stimulation**

Some women like to combine dilator insertion with sexual arousal. You may want to stimulate the clitoris before or during the dilator exercises. Sexual arousal increases natural lubrication and causes vaginal expansion, often making insertion easier. This variation is also useful in facilitating the ability to have orgasms during intercourse.

Once you feel successful with dilator insertion on your own, you may want to ask your partner to join you during some sessions. It is important that both you and your partner feel comfortable with this arrangement. Working together, your partner can learn how to comfortably insert a dilator and move it around. Active and specific communication is essential. This practice with a dilator can help prepare you for engaging in sexual intercourse or another form of partner penetration pleasuring. You both come to understand the challenge of the healing process and develop skills for working together as a team.

## **Sexual relations**

It is best to avoid sexual activity that involves any type of vaginal penetration during the dilator treatment period. Non-vaginal penetration sexual activities, such as oral sex and manual stimulation, are fine.

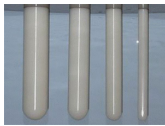
The transition from plastic dilators to a partner's penis or fingers is often an exciting step. To make the transition, your partner has to learn a passive role, letting you control the insertion and then just rest inside the vagina for a while. In time heterosexual couples can expand this exercise to permit insertion by the male of his own penis, clitoral stimulation, some thrusting, and experimentation with different positions.

Vaginal dilators allow you to get used to sensations common in intercourse and other forms of penetrative sex (such as manual and dildo sex toy stimulation). Keep in mind that penetrative sex is not always 100% comfortable. Little temporary tugs and pressures are often just part of getting started. If some

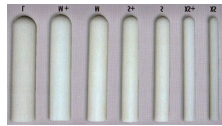
minor discomfort exists, try moving ahead anyway -- but if obvious pain persists, don't ignore it, stop. If you encounter unexpected difficulty, you may want to practice with the dilators some more before attempting intercourse again. Continued dilator use may be necessary, from time to time, to keep the vaginal area relaxed and comfortable.

Vaginal dilators can be very successful in helping women overcome penetration problems, but if old symptoms reoccur, don't hesitate to consult your physician.

Note: The white plastic tubular vaginal dilators described in this article are a product of Syracuse Medical Devices (315-449-0657, 315-449-0756 fax, [syrmed@twcnny.rr.com](mailto:syrmed@twcnny.rr.com)). They are also made in seven progressive sizes.



set of four



set of seven



[Wendy Maltz](#), is an internationally recognized author and sex therapist. She retired from providing counseling services in 2016 and stays active with media interviews. Wendy's books include the sexual abuse recovery classic, [The Sexual Healing Journey \(3rd Edition\)](#), as well as, numerous other books on sexuality topics such as women's sexual fantasies, sexual love poetry, and overcoming problems caused by pornography. Her highly-acclaimed educational website, [www.HealthySex.com](http://www.HealthySex.com), contains many articles, videos, and interviews for overcoming sexual problems, developing skills, and enhancing sexual relations.

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