

## Radiotherapy-induced vaginal stenosis

Pelvic radiotherapy can cause the vagina to lose some of its elasticity and it can cause scarring, which may cause vaginal stenosis. This can lead to pain during sex, and make intercourse and gynecological examinations difficult.

Vaginal stenosis and loss of elasticity can be prevented by dilating the vagina regularly. The dilation therapy can be started during radiotherapy, or 2 to 8 weeks after it has concluded.

### Vaginal dilation

You can start dilation therapy when the doctor responsible for your care has given you permission to do so. Do not start the dilation therapy if the healing process of the surgical area has been delayed or if you have been diagnosed with a vaginal infection.

Our recommendation is that vaginal dilation therapy is carried out at least **three times a week**. If the dilation **causes pain or you experience recurrent bleeding**, you should discuss this with a sexual counsellor or the doctor responsible for your care.

If the dilation therapy must be paused, it is continued when the vaginal mucosa has healed. Usually, the dilation therapy **should last for 6 to 12 months**, but this varies from person to person, depending on their age and which treatments have been administered. If necessary, it can be resumed if the vaginal stenosis returns.

### Intercourse

Intercourse is the best dilation method and it is permitted during dilation therapy. However, intercourse is not always an option.

### Digital dilation or dilation wands

You can use your fingers to assess the size of your vagina and to choose the right sized dilation wand (plastic rod). Sexual counsellor will give you a dilator set and instruct you how to carry out the therapy. You can later move up to use a bigger dilator wand.

### Lubricant

Using plenty of lubricant is necessary during intercourse and other dilation methods. The lubricant must be water-based, and these can be bought from pharmacies.

## Hygiene

**To avoid infections, it is important to ensure that the dilation instruments are clean.**

Dilation wands can be washed using water and mild soap. **To ensure good intimate hygiene,** it is sufficient to wash the genital area once a day using lukewarm water and patting the area dry. Avoid using soap and disinfectants to prevent drying the mucosa. To ensure that the mucosa stays flexible, we recommend using water-based lubricants or body oils: note that these must be washed out before undergoing radiotherapy.

## Dilator therapy using a dilator wand

- Make some time and find a quiet place where you can relax and use the dilator wand in peace.
- Remember to use plenty of lubricant.
- You can carry out the dilator therapy in different positions, for example lying on your back with your knees bent, or standing with one leg up on a small stool, for example.
- Push the dilator wand into the vagina as far as it goes without applying force.
- When the wand is inserted, move it carefully forward, back, and from side to side, and twist it around carefully.
- Remove the wand slowly by twisting it clockwise and counterclockwise.
- Light discharge, including bloody discharge, can occur during the dilation.