

Personal Care Following Pelvic Radiation or Vaginal Implant



**PATIENT
EDUCATION**

While radiation is effective in destroying tumor cells, it also results in a side effect that requires your personal care.

This side effect is called atrophy or shrinking and results from scar tissue which forms in the vagina following the radiation treatments. If you do not follow instructions carefully, your vagina will shorten and may close.

It is important that you keep your vagina open so your physician can examine you adequately on each return visit. It is recommended that you have entry into your vagina twice a week for 6 months following the radiation to prevent vaginal scarring from occurring.

Your vagina can be kept open by vaginal dilatation or stretching. This may be done by:

- Regular sexual intercourse
- Use of a dilator
- A combination of intercourse & dilator use

Sexual Intercourse

You may resume intercourse 3 weeks after you finish radiation unless otherwise indicated by the physician. Since the radiation will cause vaginal dryness, you will need to use a water soluble lubricant to make intercourse more comfortable for you. Water soluble lubricants like *K-Y Jelly®* or *Astroglide®* are available at any drug store without a prescription.

Do not use Vaseline® or lotions for lubrication. These are oil based and will not flow out of the body freely, leaving a moist area where bacteria may grow. They also might contain perfumes that could irritate the vagina.

You may have some bleeding or spotting following intercourse and experience some discomfort. Do not be frightened by this. As the tissue begins to stretch, the bleeding and discomfort should subside. Try to be relaxed.

You are NOT a danger to your sexual partner and you cannot transmit cancer or radiation to your partner. Sexual intercourse is a natural way of dilating your vagina and a necessary part of your emotional relationship.

If you are not able to have intercourse twice a week, we recommend that you use a vaginal dilator.

Dilator Use

Begin using the dilator (if you can do so comfortably) 3 weeks after you finish your radiation:

1. Apply a water soluble lubricant to the rounded end of the dilator.
2. Lie on your back in bed with your knees bent and slightly apart.
3. Insert the rounded end of the dilator into your vagina gently and as deeply as you can without causing discomfort.
4. Let it stay in place for 10 minutes.
5. Withdraw and clean the dilator with soap and hot water, rinsing and then drying well.
6. Do this twice a week.

Examine the dilator before each use to be sure it is smooth. If there are cracks or rough edges, do not use it. We will replace it if you contact us.

You should not experience any pain or discomfort while using the dilator if you are gentle and remain relaxed.

Do NOT be alarmed if there is slight bleeding or spotting after using the dilator. This is a normal result of stretching the vaginal tissue.

Do NOT use force in inserting the dilator.

If you experience difficulty or have any questions, you may call your physician or nurse in the:

Radiation Department at **716-845-3173**

-OR -

Gynecology Department at **716-845-5855**