

Can you recommended creams or lubricants?

If you are not already menopausal the radiotherapy will cause the menopause. This has a variety of effects, one of which is vaginal dryness.

Suitable lubricants to use for the dilators and for intercourse (sex) are:

- **PJUR** – available on prescription
- **Liquid Sylk** – available in chemists and on prescription
- **Replens** – may be used with the lubricants above

If you have any issues regarding intercourse at any time before, during or after treatment, please contact the **Clinical Nurse Specialist** who will be able to offer some practical advice to you and can be referred for psychosexual counselling if requested. You can book an appointment directly with her on a Wednesday afternoon by calling **Telephone: 01483 571122 ext 2038.**

For further information or advice please contact

**Royal Surrey County Hospital
Surrey and Sussex Trust**
Network Clinical Nurse Specialist
Gynaecological Oncology
Telephone: 01483 571122 ext 2038

Frimley Park Hospital
Clinical Nurse Specialist
Telephone: 01276 526757

Ashford and St Peter's Hospital
Clinical Nurse Specialist
Telephone: 01932 872000 ext 6712

East Surrey Hospital
Clinical Nurse Specialist
Telephone: 01737 768511 ext 6774

East Surrey Macmillan Cancer Support Centre
Canada Avenue, Redhill, RH1 5RH
Telephone: 01737 304176

Reference source:

Best practice guidelines on the use of vaginal dilators in women receiving pelvic radiotherapy, July 2015.

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm
Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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**Royal Surrey
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NHS Foundation Trust

Use of vaginal dilators following pelvic radiotherapy

- **Ashford and St Peter's Hospital**
- **Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital**
- **East Surrey and Crawley Hospital**
- **Frimley Park Hospital**
- **Royal Surrey County Hospital**
- **Surrey and Sussex Hospital**

Patient information leaflet

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 radiotherapy.

Radiotherapy and surgery can sometimes cause long term side effects to the vagina. This will eventually cause scarring, which may bring about narrowing or shortening of the vaginal walls. Radiotherapy can also cause vaginal dryness, irritation and soreness to this area.

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

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

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 for 3 times a week for at least a year. We can review this with you after a year. (It may be necessary to continue using the dilator indefinitely.) If you are sexually active you can alternate the use of the dilators with sexual intercourse. A dilator does not replace intercourse. Use the size of dilator that is most comfortable to insert, but where you can feel it stretch the vagina walls slightly too.

How do I use the dilator?

- We recommend that you find a comfortable place where you can use the dilator.
- Place a water-soluble lubricant, such as 'Sylk' or 'PJUR' on the rounded end of the dilator, and around the entrance to the vagina. (see end of leaflet for details)
- There are various positions in which to use the dilator. We recommend that you either lie down on your back with your knees slightly apart and bent, or stand with one leg raised and resting on something and use the dilator as you would inserting a tampon.
- Using firm gentle pressure, insert the dilator into your vagina as gently and as deeply as is comfortable. Do not force the dilator.

- Once the dilator is inside the vagina, gently rotate for 5 minutes and remove.
- After use, remove the dilator; wash it with soapy water, rinse well and dry.
- Some women find that they experience slight discomfort after using the dilators for the first time. If you do, we suggest that you use Paracetamol as a painkiller. If you are allergic to Paracetamol, contact your clinical nurse specialist or radiographer who can suggest another medication.
- 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.

We recommend that you start using the dilator commencing 4 weeks after treatment, when any pain has settled. You may if you prefer, use the dilator through your treatment if you are not sore. If you experience any pain or heavy bleeding when using your dilator please consult your hospital doctor or clinical nurse specialist.

If you have any concerns regarding the information contained in this leaflet or about your treatment please speak to your hospital doctor, clinical nurse specialist or radiographer.

You can continue having sexual intercourse at any point through or after treatment, if you are comfortable.

If you have any concerns or worries regarding sexual intercourse, the Clinical Nurse Specialist can offer practical advice in her clinic. Please call her on **01483 571122** ext **2038**.