

Using a Dilator

Rules:

1. Get permission from your doctor or nurse practitioner before starting with a dilator program.
2. If you've just had surgery or have an unhealed scar in the abdomen or perineum, do NOT use dilators
3. If you have had a baby, you should wait at least 6 weeks before working on perineal scars AND get your doctor's permission.
4. STOP if you have excessive pain in a scar.
5. If you have numbness or tingling locally or down your leg, then move off that spot.
6. Alert your doctor or nurse if you smell a foul odor or notice strange discharge.

Suggestions:

Take a hot bath or shower first to relax and warm the muscles, or try using a heating pad over your abdomen while doing these exercises.

Frequency:

Exercises should be performed 2/day for a minimum of 10-minute sessions. You may leave a dilator in for as long as an hour safely to achieve a really good stretch.

IMPORTANT!! DO NOT FORCE A DILATOR IN EVER. DILATOR USE SHOULD NEVER MAKE YOU SCARED OR ANXIOUS. YOU SHOULD STRETCH BUT NOT HURT. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF MORE ANXIOUS THAN USUAL WHILE USING A DILATOR, STOP.

Set Up:

First, set up your space. Ensure your privacy by locking a door if necessary. To create a sense of calm, you can dim the lights or play soothing music. If you are anxious, spend extra time doing some preparatory belly breathing exercises.

Be comfortable. Prop yourself in bed so that you are as reclined as possible yet still able to reach with the dilator. Place a towel or spare sheet under you to catch any spilled lubricant. Legs can be frogged over pillows, like in your PT session, or you can bend your knees and place your feet flat. Have extra pillows on hand, lubricant, a hand mirror if necessary, a glass of water, anything you might need. Use a non-irritating lubricant, avoid those "warming" lubes, if you can get one at a natural food store, you'll find they have fewer chemicals. Or use a good olive oil or pure raw coconut oil.

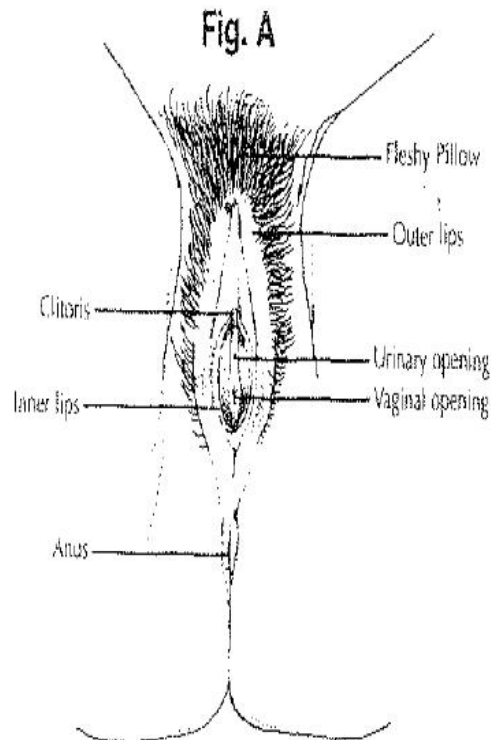
Breathing Preparation:

Place one hand on your belly, close your eyes if you wish, and gently breathe. Feel and listen to your natural breathing rhythm. Begin to encourage breath in your belly and lower ribs by exaggerating belly expansion with your inhalations. Then focus on exhaling fully and feeling your belly flatten. Imagine your pelvic region filling with your breath as you inhale then soften and relax as you exhale. Do this for as long as you want before your stretching session, and remember to breathe throughout your dilator session.

You can also do a few squeezes and relaxations of your perineum to ensure your muscles are relaxed—squeeze for 5 seconds, relax for 10 full seconds, bulge gently for 2 seconds to be certain you are as relaxed as possible.

Using the Dilator:

Wash and dry your hands and your dilator. Lubricate around your vaginal opening and place some on the tip of dilator you wish to use. Spread your inner labia with one hand and insert the lubricated tip of the dilator at the opening of the vagina (the *introitus*). If you are anxious, remember to breathe and relax. Keep “dropping your pelvic floor.” (see separate handout.)



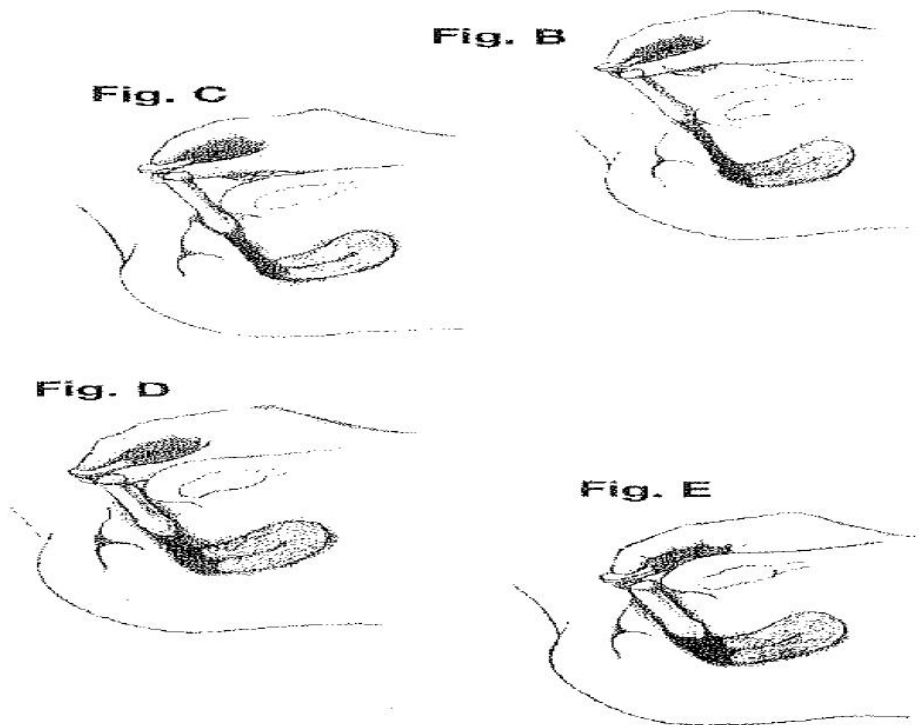
[Youngs, David D. (2001) *Pain Associated with Sexual Intercourse: Mileyx Vaginal (Silicone Dilators)*.]

Squeeze and release a few times, and then gently bulge as you insert the tip into your vagina. It's normal to feel some burning; it will pass. Some of you may need to hold it there for a minute or two while you practice relaxing. Others will be able to proceed more quickly. Go at your own speed.

You only need to insert the dilator about 2 to 3 inches. You need to hold onto it, so don't worry about putting it in all the way. You may need to angle it downward somewhat. Don't push it around at all if you are just starting.

Once it's in at a “comfortable” stretch, you need to hold it there for several minutes and even up to an hour. Merely hold it inside for a while and practice “letting go,” belly breathing etc. You may feel comfortable enough to gently pull it in and out a tiny bit to simulate “thrusting.” You can do this using tiny movements. It will help prepare you for intercourse eventually.

If you have a set, then try using a larger diameter dilator ONLY if you are COMPLETELY comfortable with your current size.



[Youngs, David D. (2001) *Pain Associated with Sexual Intercourse: Milex Vaginal (Silicone Dilators).*]

Stretching with the Dilator:

Continue to insert the dilator as far as you comfortably can, but in order to stretch in different directions, you'll need to have the dilator in at least 2 inches or so. Once it's in, begin to push the dilator sideways towards your left (right or left, doesn't matter what side you do first); we'll call this 3 o'clock. Hold for one full minute. Then proceed to push it towards 4 o'clock; 5 o'clock; 7 o'clock; 8 o'clock; 9 o'clock. **SKIP the 6 o'clock position and the 12:00 position.** Hold each stretch for one full minute. The stretch should not hurt, but should feel like a good pull. Do not stretch in the upper part of the "clock." We avoid the 6:00 position (unless you've been cleared by your PT) because it's a fragile area, the same is true for the upper part—this area is hard to work on because of the pubic bones and the urethra; also the muscles there are hard to reach with a dilator. Repeat the sequence. Or, move along to the next larger sized dilator. Squeeze and release during your routine and remember to breathe!

You may also benefit from practicing the insertion and removal process. The act of penetration is a challenging aspect of vaginismus and other types of pelvic pain, so it's a good idea to practice taking the dilator out and putting it back in 5 or 10 times (or whatever you can do.)