

## **Patient Information**

### **Instructions for at-home vaginal dilator therapy for vaginismus\***

**A vaginal dilator can help you gain confidence, knowledge, and awareness of your vagina and pelvic floor muscles in the privacy of your own home. It will help you discover what triggers these muscles to tense up; then you can focus on ways to relax the muscles and keep them soft. As you learn more about how your pelvic floor muscles respond, it'll be easier for you to gently introduce dilators of progressively larger sizes into your vagina. Confidence comes with practice, and soon inserting dilators will become comfortable and routine. Then you can transfer that skill to your sexual activities.**

Select a time and place when you can have privacy to practice. Begin by liberally lubricating the dilator and your vulva, to ensure that the dilator will be slippery and easy to insert. Before inserting the dilator, notice your body. With your mind's eye, scan your body for any areas of tension, paying particular attention to your abdomen, buttocks, and thighs. When you feel that you are relaxed, slip the dilator that you are working with gently into your vagina. If you notice any discomfort, burning, or tightening, attempt one of these strategies that have been recommended by patients:

- 1.** Follow your out-breath as you let go and soften the muscles of the pelvic floor. It appears to be easier to relax the muscles when the body is in the relaxation phase of the breath cycle. (Several women have told us that they count aloud as they exhale.)
- 2.** Visualize your vagina and pelvic floor in a state of softness. A patient offered this image: "I imagine my vagina is made of stretchy elastic that can expand at my will. I picture my vagina enlarging to accept the dilator."
- 3.** Carefully attend to the messages you are receiving from your body. Keep your belly soft and open to your breathing, keep your legs comfortably limp and relaxed, and keep your breathing easy and gentle. This will allow for gentle and gradual relaxation of the pelvic floor muscles.

Practice with the dilator for about 15 minutes per session, every other day. When the dilator that you are currently using is no longer a challenge, you can progress to the next larger dilator. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for cleaning and storage.

When you are using the dilator that is approximately the size of your partner's penis, you may consider adding intercourse to your sexual sharing. Initially you will feel more comfortable using positions for intercourse where you feel that you have the most control of the pacing, depth, and intensity of penetration.

If you feel "stuck," unable to work with the dilator comfortably, or if you think there may be some unresolved personal or relationship issues, consider consulting a psychotherapist who has expertise in sexual therapy. He or she should be familiar with vaginismus and vulvar pain conditions and be able to assist you in progressing through the vaginismus treatment program.

\*And related conditions.

Created by Jillian Romm, RN, LCSW, these instructions for at-home dilator therapy are the same ones used at the Oregon Health & Science University Program in Vulvar Health.