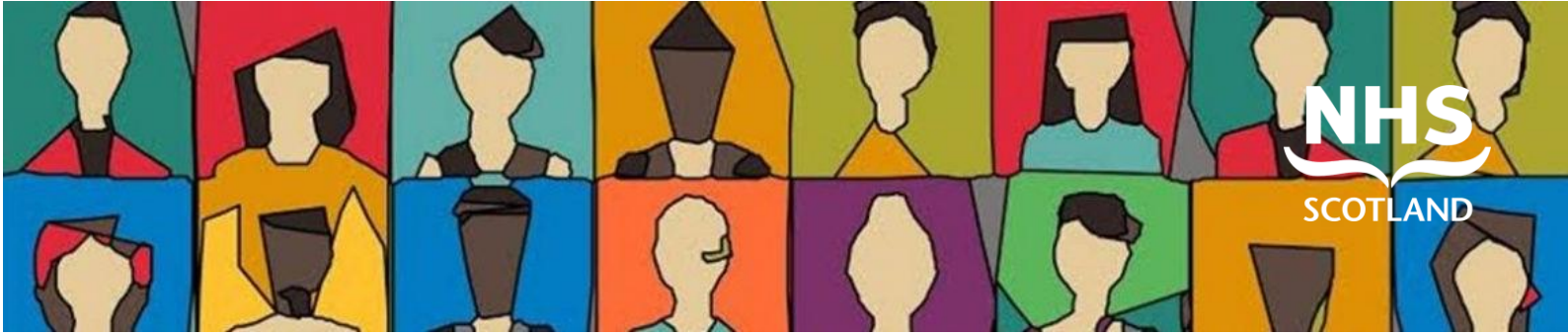


Scottish Differences of Sex Development

SDSD

National Managed Clinical Network

Vaginal Dilation

Information leaflet

This document has been prepared by Public Services Delivery Scotland (PSD Scotland) on behalf of the Scottish Differences of Sex Development (SDSD) network. Accountable to Scottish Government, PSD Scotland works at the heart of the health service providing national strategic services to the rest of NHS Scotland and other public sector organisations to help them deliver their services more efficiently and effectively. The SDSD network membership is made up of a multidisciplinary group of healthcare professionals who provide care to children and adults born with a difference in sex development or anomaly of the genitalia. The network is supported by a PSD Scotland Programme Team to drive improvement.

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What is Vaginal Dilation?

Vaginal dilation can be a sensitive subject, but it is hoped that this leaflet will help you understand more about why your doctor has recommended it for you. Vaginal dilation is a gentle enlarging/creation of the vagina and can be necessary for various reasons. A dilator is used to increase the width and length of the vagina to allow normal function. The procedure may be required to maintain the size of the vagina after surgery. Using your dilator correctly and getting good practical and emotional support before, during and after use, can make a positive difference to normal functioning.



Figure 1: shows what a typical dilator looks like

Why would I need to use Vaginal Dilators?

Vaginal dilators are helpful for people with a wide range of conditions affecting the vagina (see figure 2). They help to create or maintain normal vaginal function.

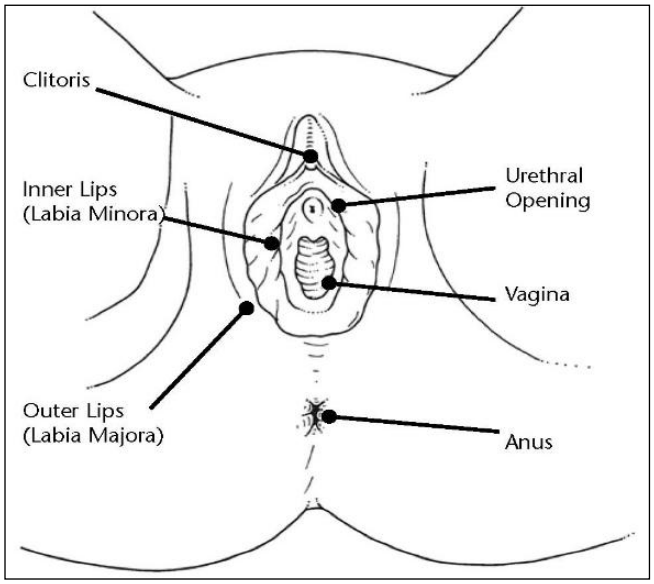


Figure 2: shows the female external genitalia.

What are the benefits of Vaginal Dilation?

Dilators are often helpful in widening a narrowed vagina or for creating a vagina without resorting to surgery. Following vaginal surgery, it may also be necessary to use dilators to keep the tissues around the operation site healthy. They can be used by the woman herself gently to accustom the vagina to light touch. Gradually this will desensitize the unduly painful tissues, so that normal activities can become possible again.

What are the disadvantages of Vaginal Dilation?

You may experience some discomfort while using your dilators, but it should not be unbearable and should lessen with time. Having somewhere private and being relaxed should help reduce any discomfort.

Would someone help me make the decision?

Your doctor or nurse may recommend a treatment with vaginal dilators. It may also be possible to talk things through with a clinical psychologist. If you are creating your own vagina then it has to be at a time when you feel you are ready. For example, when you are thinking about sexual intimacy.

If you decide not to use a dilator when it has been recommended by your doctor, your vagina may not develop or remain functional. The doctors involved in your care would generally not perform any surgery if they felt you were unable to carry out vaginal dilation.

The vagina will gradually grow and get less narrow as the dilators are used to create, lengthen or widen the vagina. The new vaginal tissues are maintained in a healthy condition by using the dilators. The vaginal tissues become softer and more supple over time.

Do I have to keep doing it?

It is important that dilation is continued twice a week upon completion to maintain the improvement.

For some people, using vaginal dilators or vibrators on a long-term basis will be necessary. For others, sexual relations may be enough to keep the vagina healthy.

Is it painful?

It can feel a little strange at first, or unpleasant, but after a short while most people can use them quite easily. If you are not used to examining yourself or find it difficult to do so, speak to your nurse or doctor who can support and reassure you.

How does it work?

You really need to have privacy and uninterrupted time to use your dilators, which can be awkward in some busy households. With privacy and quiet time, you can relax and be confident. It is also important to make yourself comfortable and relaxed.

It is useful to moisten the tip of the dilator or vibrator with some jelly like KY jelly, or some baby oil to reduce the friction. It can be a bit messy, so it is a good idea to sit or lie on a towel. You press with the tip of the dilator just at the entrance to your vagina, quite firmly but not to cause pain, although it may well be uncomfortable. Keep the pressure on for 30 minutes twice a day or 15 minutes four times a day. The direction is from the entrance to your vagina and angled towards your lower back (your tailbone). If you feel like you need to pass urine the dilator may be pressing on your bladder, so angle it lower.

Once you have carried out your dilation, rinse the dilator in warm water, dry it and put it away for your next use. You can use soap on some of the dilators but check the packaging as soaps can destroy some of the plastics used. You may also want to wash yourself gently with warm soapy water, especially if you have used lubricating jelly or baby oil.

By dilating daily, you will see quicker results.

Alternatives

Some people feel more at ease using dilators which they get at the hospital clinic or on prescription. Others may prefer vibrators as these tend to be curved and slightly easier to insert. Vibrators can be purchased in person or online from various suppliers. If you are having any difficulty in finding a supplier, your doctor or nurse should be able to help you.

It can be helpful to have the support of other people who are going through what you are experiencing. Links to organisations that may be able to provide support are available here:

nn.nhs.scot/sdsd/patients-and-families/support/

You can also discuss it with your doctor or nurse at the clinic.

Further Information

This leaflet will be available in other languages (for example, Punjabi, Urdu, Polish) or formats (for example, larger print) on request.

Contact: nss.sdsd@nhs.scot

Website: nn.nhs.scot/sdsd

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