

Sexual Assault and Rape

What are sexual assault and rape?

Sexual assault is any sexual activity that involves someone who did not agree to the sexual activity. Sexual assault can be verbal, visual, or physical. Rape is sexual intercourse done without consent. Rape is a kind of sexual assault. Sexual assault and rape may be done by a stranger but it may also be done by someone you know, as in the case of date rape or domestic violence. All forms of sexual assault and rape are crimes. Sexual assault is a crime even if you were drinking, taking drugs, given drugs, or unconscious when it happened.

Each state defines rape differently. Many states include homosexual rape, incest, and other sex offenses in the definition of rape. Statutory rape is intercourse with someone who is not yet old enough to legally consent. An example of this is a 25-year-old man having intercourse with a 13 year-old girl.

What are the effects?

The effects of rape are both physical, mental and emotional.

- Physical effects may include:
 - Injuries
 - Sexually transmitted diseases, such as herpes, gonorrhea, AIDS, and syphilis
 - Pregnancy
- Mental and emotional effects may include:
 - Severe anxiety or fearfulness
 - Depression
 - Trouble concentrating or sleeping
 - Bad dreams
 - Flashbacks
 - Feelings of guilt
 - Emotional numbness or irritability

How is it treated?

If you have been sexually assaulted, call the police and then go to the hospital. To help provide evidence of the assault:

- Do not bathe, comb your hair, or clean any part of your body. Don't even brush your teeth.
- Do not change clothes if possible.
- Do not urinate before being examined if a date rape drug may have been involved.
- Do not touch or change anything at the scene of the assault.
- Write down all the details you can about the attack and the attacker.

There may be a rape victim support service in your area. These services are usually available 24 hours a day. They will usually send someone to go with you to the police or emergency room and help you find counseling afterward.

Child victims need to be evaluated by a provider right away. It is best for the child to see a counselor trained to work with abused children.

At the hospital you will be given a thorough exam, including a pelvic exam, to check for injuries. To collect potential evidence to use against the attacker, the provider will look for specimens such as patches of torn clothing, blood, and strands of hair from the attacker. These specimens can be tested against body fluid or skin samples from suspects.

After your exam the healthcare provider may recommend that you:

- Take antibiotics or other medicine for sexually transmitted diseases.
- Take medicines to prevent pregnancy.
- Seek professional crisis counseling.
- Join a support group for rape victims.

You may be prescribed medicine to help with anxiety, depression, or trouble sleeping.

The physical effects of sexual assault can last from a day to a few months, depending on your injuries.

The mental and emotional effects are less predictable. It may take weeks, months, and in some cases, many years to recover after sexual assault. Sometimes friends and family may push you to "get over it" before you're ready. It takes time, and that's normal. Crisis counseling and rape support groups can help lessen long-term effects. Counseling can also help you cope with feelings of guilt, helplessness, depression, or anxiety.

Children who are sexually assaulted need special counseling and care.

How can I take care of myself?

Schedule a follow-up visit so that your healthcare provider can make sure that your injuries are healing properly. It is also important to get emotional support. Contact a hospital, social worker, or rape crisis center. You may benefit from a rape support group where you can share your feelings with others who have had a similar experience. Remember, if you were raped, it is not your fault.

Let friends and family members give you support. There are family counseling programs to help them deal with their concerns.

For child victims, find a counselor who specializes in working with child abuse and incest cases.

What can be done to help prevent rape?

- Teach your children to stay away from strangers. Teach them to avoid alleys and other places where there aren't other people around.

- Do not carry large, bulky purses and packages. They make it hard for you to keep your balance or move quickly. High-heeled shoes and clogs can get in your way if you have to get away quickly.
- Keep your home and car locked and secured.
- Stay away from dark and deserted places when you are alone.
- Be alert to strangers around you.
- Choose your companions wisely.
- Take a self-defense course.
- Carry a loud whistle and use it to attract attention when in danger.
- Carry a self-defense spray such as pepper spray if it is legal in your area.

You can get more information from

- Office of Women's Health
<http://www.womenshealth.gov>
- Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network
800-656-4673
<http://www.rainn.org>

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