



# Medical Care After Sexual Assault

## PATIENT GUIDE

### 1. IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

***There is no one answer or path toward healing following a sexual assault.***

- If you recently experienced a sexual assault, you may want to consider a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE).
- A SAFE is done to preserve possible DNA evidence and receive important medical care. A SAFE gives you the chance to store evidence while deciding whether to report.
- While still considering a SAFE, please do not eat, drink, take medications, or remove any tampons or pads in place until you have been cleared to do so by the medical staff providing care.
- If you are asked to give a urine sample collection, do not use cleaning wipes or wash hands afterward until cleared to do so by the medical providing care.

*Even if you have showered, or performed any activities listed above, you can still consider a SAFE as potential evidence can still be collected.*

### 2. STATISTICS ON PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

***Victims of sexual assault do not stand alone. Recent statistics highlight the prevalence of sexual assault in the military and civilian populations.***

- On [average](#), there are 463,634 victims of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States.
  - About 40% of rape victims [reported](#) injury and 12.3% reported a sexually transmitted disease.
  - About 70% of rape victims (16.4 million women) experienced some form of impact [requiring](#) healthcare.
- 6,053 military members [reported](#) experiencing sexual assault during military service in 2018, with the Department of Defense estimating about 20,500 service members experienced sexual assault.

***If you have experienced sexual assault, consider talking to your provider about the potential conditions and long-term effects that may impact survivors.***

### 3. ASSOCIATED CONDITIONS OF ASSAULT

- Chronic pelvic pain without a clear physical cause
- Menstrual disturbances (e.g., irregular menstrual cycles 'periods', excessive bleeding)
- Multiple yeast infections (i.e., a fungal infection that can cause vaginal burning and itching)
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (i.e., a bacterial infection that can cause pelvic pain and fever)
- Fibromyalgia (i.e., a chronic condition that causes widespread pain and tenderness in the body)
- Gastrointestinal disorders (i.e., disorders that may cause discomfort in the abdomen or irregular defecation)
- Headache disorders

### 4. LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ASSAULT:

- Individuals who have survived sexual assault may experience a general decline in personal health
- General symptoms of trauma:
  - Nausea
  - Headaches
  - Fatigue
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Feeling jumpy or more prone to being startled
  - Difficulty concentrating

*If you experienced assault that included strangulation and/or suffocation, it is important that you receive immediate medical attention, even if there are no visible injuries.*

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## 5. SEXUAL ASSAULT FORENSIC EXAM (SAFE)

- A SAFE is a thorough physical examination performed by a Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examiner (SAMFE).
- A SAMFE is an experienced medical providers (i.e., nurses, midwives, physician assistants, physicians) with at least two years of clinical experience and training in sexual assault forensic exams.
  - A SAMFE provider may be male or female.
  - All SAFEs are performed with a 'stand-by' Corpsman present during the exam.
- **This exam is performed only with your consent. Your consent can be withdrawn at any step of the examination or for certain portions.**
  - A Victim Advocate will see you before the SAMFE and before a SAFE is conducted. Victim Advocates are volunteers that have received appropriate training and can be civilian or military. Victim Advocates have a separate watch bill than the SAMFE.
  - Victim Advocates will familiarize you with the [2910 Consent Form](#) which collects personal information and details the type of report you can file.
  - During your consultation with the Victim Advocate, they will talk you through a [restricted or unrestricted report](#). For more information on filing a report, please visit page 2 of this [resource](#).
- The SAMFE will ensure that you receive appropriate medical care to include prevention of an unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- The SAMFE will also collect potential evidence of an assault from your body and clothes.
  - This potential evidence may be useful in an investigation should you choose to pursue one now or in the future.

To learn more about SAFEs , please refer to this link: <https://shop.safehelpline.org/> or scan the QR code to the right



## 6. RESOURCES AVAILABLE WHEN CONSIDERING SAFE

### [Sexual Assault Response Team:](#)

The goal of this team is to provide a streamlined, coordinated, and compassionate approach to patients who have experienced sexual assault. To access the sexual assault hotline, utilize one of the following:

- **SAPR 24/7 Sexual Assault Hotline: 877-995-5247**
- **Military Crisis Line: 800-273-8255**
  - *Press 1: Psychological Health Resources*
- **Military One Source: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil>**

### Victim Advocates:

- Victim Advocates are a confidential resource, and they will provide you with information on your rights and choices regarding reporting options, services and resources available.
- When you present at the Emergency Room, the nurse will contact a Victim Advocate for you. Alternatively, you may request the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator contact one for you. Meeting with a Victim Advocate does not obligate you to accept their services or make an official report of sexual assault.
- Victim Advocates assist you in working with your healthcare team to make an informed decision about your care options. A Victim Advocate is typically short-term but can also be used long term to assist you navigate the trial, if indicated, or other processes.
- If you have experienced sexual assault by a spouse or intimate partner, the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) Victim Advocate will be notified by the Sexual Assault Response Team.
- When accessing care, command healthcare personnel are required to notify the local Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) for any disclosure of sexual assault.

***After receiving healthcare and regardless of whether a SAFE was completed, you can receive follow up from a health care provider. Contact your victim advocate or SARC to assist with coordination.***

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## 7. WHAT TO EXPECT AT A SAFE

**To access a SAFE, please go to your nearest emergency room (ER)**

While many civilian hospitals include a SAFE program, it is best to go to a Military Treatment Facility if accessible. It is not necessary to disclose all details of the assault during the triage and medical clearance process. The goal of triage is to address immediate concerns, formulate a plan of care, and provide the right resources to you.

**At the front desk:** Staff will check you in and take your vital signs

**The triage nurse will ask you about:**

- Your medical and surgical history, your allergies, and any medications you are taking
- Current injuries, pain you are experiencing, and immediate concerns
- Other general screening and safety questions

It is important to let the nurse know if you lost consciousness, were threatened or assaulted with a weapon, or were strangled or suffocated (pressure applied to your neck, or over your mouth/nose).

**For Medical Clearance:** The ER Provider will review the information you provided during triage

**Additional details that are helpful in coordinating your plan of care include:**

- Last menstrual period; current method of birth control (if applicable)
- When the assault occurred
- Areas where penetration occurred (or likely occurred), if known
- Details about injuries or symptoms

## 8. TREATMENT OPTIONS AFTER MEDICAL EVALUATION

### **Pregnancy Prevention:**

You will receive a pregnancy test and options for emergency contraception

**Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):** You may be tested for a range of STIs

**Medications:** You may receive antibiotics to prevent and treat STIs

**HIV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis:** This may be considered up to 72 hours after exposure

## 9. TAKING A STEP BACK

Unhealthy and/or abusive relationships may present risk for sexual assault. If you notice any of the below warning signs or feel something 'off' in your relationship, please reach out to the [Family Advocacy Program](#) or [Department of Defense Safe Helpline](#) (877-995-5247) and seek help.

For more information on unhealthy relationships and resources, please see page 38 of the [Deployment Readiness Education for Service Women \(DRES\) App Resource](#).

Healthy Relationships	Unhealthy Relationships	Abusive Relationships
<p><b>A healthy relationship means both you and your partner are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating</li> <li>• Respectful</li> <li>• Trusting</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Equal</li> <li>• Enjoying personal time away from each other</li> <li>• Making mutual choices</li> <li>• Financial partners</li> </ul>	<p><b>You may be in an unhealthy relationship if your partner is:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not communicating</li> <li>• Disrespectful</li> <li>• Not trusting</li> <li>• Dishonest</li> <li>• Trying to take control</li> <li>• Only spending time together</li> <li>• Pressured into activities</li> <li>• Unequal economically</li> </ul>	<p><b>Abuse is occurring in a relationship when one partner is:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating in a hurtful or threatening way</li> <li>• Mistreating</li> <li>• False accusations of cheating</li> <li>• Denying their actions are abusive</li> <li>• Controlling</li> <li>• Isolating their partner from others</li> </ul>