

Common Reactions to Sexual Assault

Victims suffer a significant degree of physical and emotional trauma during a rape, immediately following a rape and for a considerable time after a rape. Sometimes, reactions to sexual assault can be delayed months or even years. Every victim of rape responds uniquely to the assault and the recovery process is different for each individual. The following is a list of reactions to rape. It is not a comprehensive list, but rather a sampling of common post-sexual assault symptoms.

Victims can expect to experience some or all of these symptoms in varying degrees during the recovery process:

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive	Social
Changes in eating patterns Changes in sleeping patterns Eating disorders Fatigue Flashbacks Hypervigilant "startle response" Nightmares Gastrointestinal irritability Headaches "Self-medication" with alcohol or other drugs HIV/AIDS Muscular tension Physical Injuries Pregnancy Sexually transmitted diseases Somatic illness	Anger Numbness Anxiety Denial Depression, Sadness Despair Embarrassment Fear Helplessness Irritability Loss of control Low self-esteem Mood swings Hopelessness Obsessions/compulsions Phobias Sense of disbelief Shame, guilt, embarrassment Feeling dirty, polluted Rage	If I don't think about it, it will go away. I am being punished. There is no such thing as justice in my case. Am I dirty. My body betrayed me. I hate my body for how it reacted. I deserved it because... What are people thinking? Will others reject me? Are people blaming me? Why me? If only I hadn't... If it happened once, it can happen again. Bad things happen to bad people If it's not my fault, why am I being blamed? I will never be the same again.	Changes in lifestyle Difficulty getting things accomplished Difficulty concentrating Problems with intimacy Fear around men Discomfort around people in general Disruption in sexual relations Fear of being alone Fear of leaving home Fear/nervousness in crowds Feeling "different" from everyone else Hypersensitive when relating to others Loss of trust in self and others Withdrawal from people, relationships and activities Loss of enthusiasm

	Feeling alone		
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