

Medical Information

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By: Jes

If you have just been assaulted, please make sure you are in a safe place, away from your attacker. If you are considering going to the police, I advise you to avoid showering, douching, brushing your teeth or drinking anything. In addition, do not wash the clothing you wore at the time of the rape. If you do decide to take it off, please put it into paper bags, which will preserve any evidence. I know it is hard to think of things like these, but you may decide to go to the police, who will be glad you took these steps. I hope you will read this page as well as the page about a police investigation and the one about prosecuting in the criminal courts to explore your options.

What you do next is your decision, but I urge you to have go to the hospital to have a medical examination done, which is similar to a regular gynecologist visit. This is important because you may have injuries that are undetectable and you may also need emergency contraception and protection against sexually transmitted diseases. While you are there, you may chose to have an evidence collection examination, which is sometimes known as a "rape kit" done. The evidence can be kept anonymously until you decide what you want to do. You may choose to report the assault to your local police or you may decide against doing that. Having the evidence collection, sometimes called a rape kit, done as soon as possible will ensure that you have evidence of the rape. Going to the police will not ensure that your rapist will be caught, tried and convicted, but you will know that you what you did may help others in the future. If are certain you do not want to take legal action against your attacker, which is a personal decision, I urge you to seek medical attention, either at the hospital or through your own health practitioner as soon as possible for the sake of your own health.

The Evidence Collection Examination

After rape or attempted rape, medical attention is important for many reasons. Even if you do not wish to prosecute your attacker, a medical examination is necessary to protect you

against unwanted pregnancy, diseases and to check for injuries that you may not notice. In addition, the hospital staff will be able to direct you to the resources available to you as a survivor. If you do wish to prosecute, the medical examination will serve as evidence collection as well. If you chose to go through with the collection procedure, the doctor in charge will use medical procedures to locate evidence. It was very difficult for me to think of myself as evidence, but I am so glad that I did. My rapist is in jail because evidence was found. With new medical procedures even a small hair or a tiny piece of an eyelash can allow a DNA connection to the perpetrator to be established. In most states, you may decide to have your evidence kit processed up to six months after having it taken so you do not need to decide whether or not to prosecute right away. Remember, at any point during the procedure, you have the choice to stop and you may refuse any part of it.

For me, having the examination done was terribly difficult and intrusive. However, I am now grateful that I went through with it. It is providing evidence that I hope will send my rapist to jail. If you have been raped within the past seventy-two hours, evidence collection is possible and you may want to consider it. During the medical examination, the doctor will perform several steps to protect you and collect evidence.

Even if your rape was years earlier, it is important you receive medical attention to be tested and treated for diseases that can go unnoticed. You can do this inexpensively by finding a Planned Parenthood Center near you. This is an inexpensive way of receiving healthcare for women and the doctors and nurses are usually sensitive to your needs and concerns.

Surviving the Process

When you chose to seek medical attention, I hope you will find the support you need. After sexual assault, the idea of visiting a doctor can be particularly painful, but it is necessary.

- * Bring a trusted friend with you. It may help to have a hand to hold.
- * Have the hospital call your local Sexual Assault Crisis Center. Usually, your center can have a staff member accompany you to the hospital and sit with you during the exam.
- * The staff member should have training and will be able to explain what the doctor is doing. Since most evidence collection procedures are performed in the Emergency Room, staff may be limited. However, you do have the right to request that a nurse be present at

all times. You may also request a female doctor, but this may prolong the process.

- * After life-threatening cases, rape survivors have priority in emergency rooms. If you have been waiting for a while, ask the nurse to be seen as soon as possible

- * If the doctor makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to ask for a different medical examiner.

- * You can have the doctor in charge explain exactly what s/he is going to do, if you feel that would make the process easier.

- * Bring a change of clothes with you. The clothing you wore to the hospital will be collected to be examined for further evidence.

The Examination

Collection of Clothing

- * You will be asked to disrobe while standing over a large sheet of paper. This is because your clothing may bear traces of evidence.

- * After you have taken your clothing off, each piece will be placed in separate paper bags, which will prevent decomposition of any evidence.

Collection of Hair Specimens

The examiner will comb and pluck fibers and hair from parts of your body. This is done to locate evidence and provide comparison samples.

- * The doctor will comb the hair on your head. The medical examiner will then pluck hair from different parts of your head to use for comparison purposes when analyzing the evidence.

- * The practitioner will follow the same procedures, combing your pubic hairs and plucking them. This is an uncomfortable, but necessary part of the examination, since important comparison samples can be provided.

Swabs and Smears

In order to collect certain specimens, the doctor will have to swab parts of your body. This was the most difficult part of the procedure for me and I was very grateful for the support of a friend and rape crisis counselor. Although this process can be uncomfortable, the

evidence collected is invaluable. Additionally, this will serve as a medical test to protect you against sexually transmitted diseases.

- * The medical practitioner will use cotton swabs to collect evidence from your mouth, vagina, and anal areas.
- * The swabs will then be smeared and carefully preserved on glass slides for analysis.
- * The examiner will also draw two samples of blood.

Fingernail Scrapings and Cuttings

This is done to locate and preserve skin samples in case you have scratched your assailant.

- * The practitioner will scrap underneath your fingernails and place the findings in a druggist's envelope, which is a small envelope.
- * Then your fingernails will be trimmed and the cuttings will be placed in a separate druggist's envelope.

Care and Prevention

The doctor is responsible for providing you with health care. She should inoculate you against certain STDs and give you prescriptions to prevent others as well and it is her responsibility to arm you with information. If you feel that the care you are receiving is too rushed, ask for her to slow down. Often doctors in emergency rooms have a busy schedule, but it is your right to make yourself a priority. You deserve to have the information you need explained clearly.

- * If there was vaginal penetration during your rape, the doctor will administer a pregnancy test. This is to ascertain whether or not you are pregnant, so The Morning After Pill, which is actually a series of high estrogen birth control pills, can be prescribed. If you are currently taking oral contraceptives, using an intrauterine device, or have been sterilized, this preventive medicine may not be required.
- * Your doctor may give you a high dose estrogen treatment to prevent pregnancy.

* The practitioner should prescribe an antibiotic regimen for you. It should include antibiotic coverage against gonorrhea, Chlamydia and syphilis.

* The doctor should test you for HIV infection. If this comes back negative, it unfortunately does not mean that you were not infected with HIV. You still must go to a health clinic or doctor three months later, again at six months and just to be certain, a year later. I know that this is very stressful, but it is necessary. Take gentle care of yourself, especially while waiting for the test results to come back.

If you wish to prosecute, you may need to speak to the police after you leave the hospital. For information about the investigation, please click [here](#). Whatever you do, I hope that you will be gentle with yourself afterwards.

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