Staying Healthy at College: Helping Yourself, Helping Others

What should I know about sexual assault and rape?

Sexual assault and rape can happen at college. There are things you can do to protect yourself. If you are out at night, walk in well-lighted areas with a friend. Use the security escorts available at your college. If you are at a party, make sure that your friends know where you are.

More than half of all rapes are done by someone that the victim knows or goes on a date with. So when you are getting to know a person, be careful where you go and what situations you put yourself into. You may have heard about date-rape drugs being used on college campuses. These are drugs that are dropped into a woman’s drink at a bar or at a party when she leaves her drink and goes off somewhere, or when she is distracted. To protect yourself against date-rape drugs, don’t drink something that you didn’t open yourself, don’t share drinks with anyone, don’t drink from a punch bowl, and don’t leave your drink somewhere and then drink from it later.

What should I do if I am sexually assaulted or raped?

It is important to get medical help right away. If you are sexually assaulted or raped, you should go right to your Student Health Service, Counseling Center or nearest hospital to get checked out. They’ll help you contact your college or town police if you haven’t already done so. Reporting a sexual assault or rape is important so that the person that did this to you will be caught and won’t be able to do it to someone else. You shouldn’t shower or change your clothes before you are examined, so that no evidence is destroyed.

Many women have a hard time reporting rape or sexual assault because they are embarrassed, in denial of what happened, just want to forget what happened, or think they caused it. It is very important to talk about all these feelings and all that you went through with an experienced counselor. Ask what the options are at your counseling center or Student Health Service. If you need something that your college doesn’t offer, ask for some names of counselors or groups in the community. Some colleges also offer group sessions for victims of rape and sexual assault. Also, decide who in your family or among your friends can be supportive.

• Find a safe environment - anywhere away from the attacker. Ask a trusted friend to stay with you for moral support.
• Preserve evidence of the attack - don’t bathe, brush your teeth or wash your hands. Write down all the details you can recall about the attack & the attacker.
• Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline, operated by RAINN, for free, confidential counseling, 24 hours a day: 1-800-656-HOPE.
• Get medical attention. Even with no physical injuries, it is important to determine the risks of STDs and pregnancy.
  o To preserve forensic evidence, ask the hospital to conduct a rape kit exam.
  o If you suspect you may have been drugged, ask that a urine sample be collected. The sample will need to be analyzed later on by a forensic lab.
• Report the rape to law enforcement authorities. A counselor can provide the information you’ll need to understand the process.
• Remember, it wasn’t your fault
• Recognize that healing from rape takes time. Give yourself the time you need.
• Know that it’s never too late to call. Even if the attack happened years ago, the National Sexual Assault Hotline can still help. Many victims do not realize they need help until months or years later.

How do I know if I was raped or sexually assaulted?

The definition of rape is any penetration into your vagina by a finger, a penis, or any object that happens without your consent. It is also illegal if, without your consent, someone touches your vagina with his or her mouth or penetrates you anally in any way. Keeping silent does not equal consent. Any of these things, done without your consent are wrong and illegal!

What can I do to reduce my risk of sexual assault?

• Don’t leave your beverage unattended or accept a drink from an open container.
• When you go to a party, go with a group of friends. Arrive together, watch out for each other, and leave together.
• Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
• Don’t allow yourself to be isolated with someone you don’t know or trust.
• Think about the level of intimacy you want in a relationship, and clearly state your limits.

How can I help a friend who has been sexually assaulted?

• Listen. Be there. Don’t be judgmental.
• Encourage your friend to seriously consider reporting the rape to law enforcement authorities. A counselor can provide the information your friend will need to make this decision.
• Be patient. Remember, it will take your friend some time to deal with the crime.
• Let your friend know that professional help is available through the National Sexual Assault Hotline.
• Encourage him or her to call the hotline, but realize that only your friend can make the decision to get help.

How can I protect my child from sexual abuse?

• Communicate, communicate, communicate.
• Speak to your children using the proper names for their body parts. Armed with information, children are better able to report abuse to you.
• Teach your children about safe and unsafe touches, as well as what is appropriate physical affection.
• Let your children know that respect for elders doesn’t extend to an adult that has made your child uncomfortable. It’s OK to say no and it’s OK to leave the situation.
• Trust your own instincts. If your instincts tell you something is wrong, follow-up.

For information about Internet safety, download A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety from the FBI.

The materials are available in English & Spanish

Some information provided by: The Center for Young Women’s Health Children’s Hospital Boston. www.youngwomenshealth.org