

## The Rape Aftermath: Taking Care of Yourself

If you have been raped, you deserve help and support. You will need to make some decisions about what to do next. Here are some things to think about and some suggestions for how you can take care of yourself as you begin to heal. Remember that you get to decide what is right for you and what steps to take next.

### Medical Care

You may have some urgent medical needs in the aftermath of sexual abuse. You can ask an official you trust to help you get medical care. For example, you may have injuries that need treatment. You might need to receive Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP<sup>1</sup>) to prevent you from contracting HIV, and to get treatment for other infections.

If you are given PEP, it's important that you take the PEP medication everyday as prescribed. PEP won't work if you skip days. You should know that PEP may make you feel sick. If it does, you can ask a health staff for antiemetics<sup>2</sup>.

### Safety

People who sexually abuse others often do so again and again. If you are in a cell with the rapist, you may be at risk for further violence. You can ask an official you trust to protect you. You can ask to be separated from the perpetrator, either by moving out of the cell yourself or having the perpetrator moved.

### Evidence Collection

If you decide to report the rape to officials within 72 hours, you may be given a special exam so that medical staff can collect evidence from your body. This evidence will be very important if the perpetrator is charged and goes to trial. The sooner you report, the more likely evidence can be collected. If you want such an exam, it is best to report immediately. It is also best not to bathe, use the toilet, or brush your teeth before medical staff have completed their examination. This is important for the preservation of evidence to support any criminal charges against the perpetrator.

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<sup>1</sup> PEP is medication given to rape survivors within 72 hours of the assault to prevent HIV infection.

<sup>2</sup> Antiemetics are medicines to treat vomiting and nausea.

## Emotional Support

After a sexual assault, you may feel like you are to blame. Perhaps you were told that you wanted it. You may have feelings of guilt. These reactions are both common and normal, but you should know that you did nothing to cause the abuse: it's not your fault. No matter what you may have done, you are not responsible for the rapist's behaviour. Many rape survivors find that talking to someone they trust helps them to heal. You may want to think about whether there is a staff member, friend, or family member who you can speak with about what happened and how you are feeling. Remember that healing is possible. Even if you are overwhelmed now, you will not always feel that way. You can get help. Remember: Nobody deserves to be raped, ever. The assault was not your fault.

