



SÖDERSJUKHUSET
Emergency Clinic for Rape Victims
Obstetrics/Gynaecology

COMMON REACTIONS TO RAPE OR ATTEMPTED RAPE

No reaction is wrong

We're all different and can react to violence and threats in different ways. Some people react immediately, while it takes more time for others.

During the first few days you may feel closed off. The incident can seem unreal, as if it happened in a film. One minute you might feel empty, while the next might bring a combination of feelings – sorrow, fury, fear and resignation. You might be surprised by your own reactions, and not really feel like yourself.

Your body can react in different ways. You can suffer headaches, feel cold, feel sick, or experience heart palpitations or muscle tension.

It can affect your sleep and give you nightmares. It's important that you eat, even if you don't feel like it.

You might want to come up with explanations for what happened, and there's a risk that you'll blame yourself.

After some time has passed

You can feel down, anxious, forget things, feel restless, and you'll be more wary when you go out.

Many women have trouble concentrating, so you'll need to sort out what you can manage and what you can't. You may vacillate between feeling fine some days and other days feeling like you're right back where you started after the assault.

Try to tell people how they can help. Tell people if you don't feel like telling everyone about what happened, and ask them to respect your own boundaries.

If you don't have anyone you feel close to, it's important to stay in touch with us at the Clinic or with someone else you can talk to.

Voices of women we've met

“I feel dirty and disgusting. I can hardly eat. I can't sleep, I keep having the same thoughts, and I have nightmares.”

“I feel like it's written on my forehead, like everyone can see what's been done to me.”

“I feel as if dangers are lurking everywhere. I hardly dare leave the house, and I jump if someone gets close to me on the underground.”

“Why did it have to happen? Why me? Was it something I said or did?”

“Most of my friends and family seem furious. Why don't I feel that way? I just feel like it's all my fault. I must be weird.”

“I'd rather not think about it, but then the whole thing suddenly comes flooding back.”

“I would have thought I'd put up more of a resistance – didn't imagine I'd be so frightened and unable to act. I was also scared he'd do something worse.”

“I hate it when people act like they feel so sorry for me. I'd prefer it if no one knew. I don't want my friends and family to look at me any differently.”

“Sometimes I just start crying. Sometimes I get annoyed at everything and everyone.”

“I'm just not myself. I can't concentrate or think clearly.”

“I feel like I see him everywhere when I'm out.”

“How am I ever going to trust anyone again? And will I ever be able to trust myself again?”

“I avoid everything that reminds me of what happened, but I've started feeling like it shouldn't control my life!”

Lena Wennersten, social worker, and Monika Hartig, registered psychologist