

Sexual Assault

DRUGGED AND ASSAULTED 2

WHAT CAN I DO IF I THINK I HAVE BEEN DRUGGED AND THEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED?

Safety first

The first thing to do if you feel that you have been drugged and sexually assaulted is to get yourself to a safe place, preferably with safe people. Remember that you may still be under the effect of the drug for some time after the assault. Your physical health and wellbeing at this stage is the first priority.

Ask for help

If you know or think you have been drugged and assaulted, you do not have to cope with this on your own and in secret. There are specialist services that provide help for those who have been sexually assaulted and are experienced in supporting people when the assault includes the use of drugs. If you think you may have been assaulted even if you have no clear memory of the event, you can still talk to a trained counsellor at one of these services about what happened and the way it is affecting you. Many people find this helpful.

Physical Health

Your physical health is important so you may wish to speak to a doctor about any concerns you might have. Women also need to consider the possibility of pregnancy as a result of the assault. You also need to be aware of the need to get a check up for sexually transmitted infections and to practice safe sex. A sexual assault counsellor or your local hospital can assist by referring you to a doctor in your local area for you to talk about your options for a medical examination and other health issues.

Remember: Because of the effects of the drug or alcohol you may not remember much or anything about the assault. Don't fill in the gaps by imagining the worst things that might have happened. This can significantly add to the stress you are feeling and create additional trauma for you.

Don't Blame Yourself

Many people who have been drugged and sexually assaulted feel that somehow they were responsible for the assault. They look for reasons to blame themselves. "It was my fault because I accepted the drink" or "I must have looked like an easy target" or even "I can't believe I was so stupid to leave with him". The reality is that potential rapists who drug their victims are experts at appearing friendly and non-threatening. In these circumstances people usually don't suspect that they are about to be drugged or assaulted. They also forget that while they are under the influence of a drug, they do not behave as they normally do, especially when that drug has been given to them without their knowledge.

Remember: A person who has been drugged and assaulted has been the victim of a carefully premeditated crime!

CAN I TAKE POLICE ACTION?

Generally the answer to this question is yes, however, when someone has been drugged and assaulted, the situation can become complicated. The police can offer advice about this and even if no charges are laid, making a report to the police (without this being a formal statement) can make you feel better and could help them in future investigations of similar assaults.

The forensic examination

If you do contact the police they may suggest that you have a forensic examination. This is not a 'test' to see if you have been raped but a special medical examination that gathers evidence for use in a court case. A doctor who is specially trained carries out the forensic examination. During this examination the doctor looks for evidence of an assault including the collection of body fluids that could identify your assailant.

Drug Screens

The forensic examination can include taking a sample of your urine to screen it for drugs. This can sometimes (but not always) confirm that a drug was used. If a drug does not show up this does not prove that you were not drugged. The small amounts of drug can often be very hard to detect. The drug may also have left your body already. For this reason it is best to have the forensic examination as soon as you have made up your mind to go ahead with it. However, you need to be aware that any drug you have taken recently, including illegal drugs can also show up. If you have used other drugs, remember that this information is then in the hands of the police and could also be used later in court in an attempt to discredit you as a witness. Discuss this with the sexual assault counsellor or doctor. You can of course have the forensic examination without a drug screen.

Remember it is your choice to have a forensic examination as well as to provide a urine sample for drug screening.

Even if your assailant does not face trial, or is not found, or if the drug that was used in assaulting you is not identified, this does not mean that an offence was not committed.

Sexual Assault Fact Sheet

STEPS TO RECOVERY

- Ψ Safety first. Try to make sure that you are safe, especially from the assailant.
- Ψ Take care of your physical health and wellbeing.
- Ψ Look after yourself so that you can get back your feeling of control of your own life.
- Ψ Even if you experience feelings of guilt or shame, don't blame yourself. It was not your fault that you were assaulted.
- Ψ Accept that under the influence of drugs people often do things or react in ways that is not typical for them.
- Ψ If you cannot remember exactly what happened, try not to scare yourself with worse case scenarios - it can increase your stress and add significantly to the trauma
- Ψ Be aware that using drugs in the future, especially soon after the assault, could lead to flashbacks.
- Ψ If part or all of the memory of the event is missing, accept that you may never recover that memory.

Remember: Talk about it with people you trust and who will respect your privacy. Remember that they will probably be angry and upset for you so you will need to tell them what kind of support you want. **DON'T** let them blame you for what happened, and **DON'T** let them push you into any action that is not your choice.

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

- Ψ A Sexual Assault Service in your area. These services are confidential and staffed by trained counsellors who work in the area of sexual assault. These services can help to organise a doctor.
- Ψ Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline **1800 010 120**
- Ψ Your own General Practitioner and Sexual Health Services can provide information about sexually transmitted diseases and contraception
- Ψ Through your local hospital or community health service. A drug and alcohol counsellor would be able to answer your questions about possible drugs used and their effects.
- Ψ The police. Even if you are not going to take legal action, information about how perpetrators are victimising people is useful to the police. It is of course your choice to decide to contact them

Adapted from: Drugged & Assaulted, Central Sydney Area Health Service, April 2000