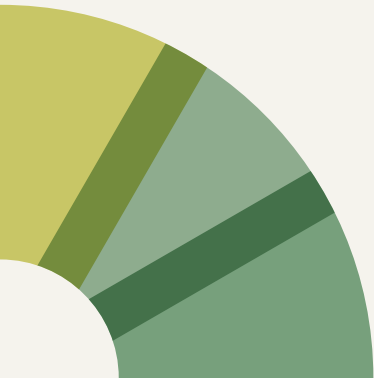


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Rape Crisis Scotland

**Information  
for survivors of  
sexual violence**

**Sexual health**



# Sexual health

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## Background

- » If you have recently experienced sexual violence, there may be a risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, and pregnancy (for women of childbearing age)
- » Any risk depends on the type of sexual violence (vaginal, oral, anal) and protection/contraception
- » If you experienced sexual violence some time ago, there may be ongoing sexual health issues. This could be a result of injury to sensitive areas such as your genital area or mouth; or untreated infection which may be symptomless but can cause internal damage if left untreated
- » Sexual violence may also lead to sexual difficulties which may affect your intimate relationship with your partner (if you have one)

## Finding help and information

- » It is natural to feel scared or nervous about going to a doctor or clinic
- » But it is important for your own health, and your partner's (if you have one), that you get a check-up at a health clinic so you can get advice about infections and treatment

- » It may also be helpful to speak to a sexual health nurse/doctor about any other sexual issues/difficulties which may arise from sexual violence
- » If you go to a family planning or sexual health clinic for testing or advice you do not need to tell them what happened unless you want to. You do not need to give them your real name and you do not need to agree to any tests. The services are free and confidential. You can also get these services from your GP but this will be recorded in your medical records
- » Health workers in certain services, such as sexual health, routinely ask everyone about domestic and sexual abuse. They are trained to provide information and support to anyone who discloses abuse
- » There are specialist services for young people and also for older women (menopause clinics)

## What you can do: self-care tips for survivors

It is important to ask for help if you are in any way concerned about your sexual health. Some examples are:

### Risk of pregnancy

For women who think there is a risk of pregnancy:

- » It is important to act as quickly as you can. You can get the emergency contraceptive pill free at every pharmacy. You can take it up to three days (72 hours) or in some cases up to 5 days (120 hours) after the assault. The earlier the better

- » If you cannot get to a pharmacy or take the emergency contraceptive pill in time, an IUD, often called a coil, can be fitted up to five days (120 hours) after the assault and must stay inside you until the time of your next period. You need to go to your nearest sexual health clinic to have one fitted. The RCS Helpline can help you find the nearest service or see online at [www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk](http://www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk)
- » If you think there is a risk that you may be pregnant you can get a pregnancy test from a sexual health or GUM clinic, your GP or you can buy a test over the counter at a pharmacy

### **If you are pregnant**

- » If you are pregnant and do not wish to continue with the pregnancy you can ask your GP or a doctor at a sexual health/family planning clinic for a termination (abortion). This can legally take place up until the 24th week of the pregnancy. However, it is rare to have a termination after 18 weeks. Early terminations are generally safer than later ones. In order to arrange for a termination, you need to see at least two doctors. The first will refer you to the second. If your own GP has chosen not to be involved in referrals for termination, they must refer you to another doctor or service which will
- » If you are under 16, you have the right to a termination as long as the doctor who sees you decides you fully understand the procedure and its implications. Your parents do not have to be told
- » If you are pregnant and do wish to continue the pregnancy or it is after 24 weeks there are various issues to consider, for example, whether you want to keep the baby or have

it adopted. These are difficult decisions and you may wish to discuss them with a support worker on the RCS Helpline or a trusted friend. If you are considering adoption, your local social work department can help with this

- » Whatever your choice or circumstances, the RCS Helpline and local rape crisis centres can give you information and discuss options

### **Risk of sexually transmitted infection**

- » STIs can be passed through the mouth, vagina or the anus. Some have symptoms and some do not. It is always worth getting checked as all STIs can be treated and many can be cured
- » You do not have to have a test to get treated for some STIs
- » Some tests can be done by post
- » There are details of STIs at [www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk](http://www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk)

### **Risk of HIV**

- » HIV is mostly spread through unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex. Oral sex is low risk unless you have open sores or cuts in your mouth. If you have been exposed to HIV you can take medication called PEP (post exposure prophylaxis) which reduces the risk. You need to take it within 72 hours; the earlier it is taken, the better
- » If you think you are at risk of HIV go to your nearest sexual health or GUM clinic or contact NHS 24 on 0845 24 24 24 for more information

## Sexual intimacy

- » If there is any risk of you infecting your partner with an STI or HIV, it is important to practise 'safer sex' (sexual activity with fewer risks than penetrative sex) and to use condoms, lubricant or oral protection if you have penetrative sex
- » It is OK to take time out from the sexual side of your relationship to work through feelings and memories about what happened. Your partner should respect your choice and support you
- » See the information sheet on *Relationships* for more on sexual intimacy

## Contraception

- » There are many different kinds of contraception. You may find it helpful to speak to a health worker to find out what will best suit you
- » Contraception is free from the NHS through:
  - > Your GP
  - > Sexual health or family planning clinic
  - > Young people's services
  - > Some genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics

You can buy condoms, diaphragms, caps and spermicide from pharmacies. Condoms are also available in garages and dispensers in pubs, clubs and so on.

**Remember: you are important. Your feelings matter. You do not have to cope on your own.**

## Help and information

**There are many people who want to help. You can contact the Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline for support and information. We can tell you about support in your area. You don't need to give your name. When you contact us by phone or text, we cannot see your phone number. You don't have to share anything you don't want to – we will take things at your pace. We're open every day from 5pm to midnight. When you're ready, we're here.**

- » **Phone: 08088 01 03 02** (calls are free and our number will not show on your itemised bill)
- » **Text: 07537 410 027** (texts are charged at your normal network rate, texts to us will show on an itemised bill as texts to our mobile phone number)
- » **Webchat: [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)**
- » **Email: [support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)**

If you are feeling overwhelmed and you think this is having a serious effect on your health, speak to your GP or another professional. They may be able to refer you for talking or other therapies which can help you manage better.

The information in this leaflet draws on various sources including those below. **You can find more information online at:**

- » [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)
- » Information after rape and sexual assault:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/13141931/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/13141931/0)
- » [www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)
- » [www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Anger.asp](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Anger.asp)
- » [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- » [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

App: eCBT Trauma

## Local Rape Crisis Centres

Rape Crisis Centres are located in all local authorities in Scotland; for the most up to date contact information and referral criteria please go to: [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/about-local-rapecrisis-centres/](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/about-local-rapecrisis-centres/)

### **Aberdeen**

Rape Crisis Grampian

### **Argyll & Bute**

Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis Centre

### **Dumfries & Galloway**

Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Support Centre

### **Dundee**

Women's Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre

### **East Ayrshire**

The STAR Centre

### **Edinburgh**

Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre

### **Fife**

Fife Rape & Sexual Assault Centre

### **Forth Valley**

Forth Valley Rape Crisis

### **Glasgow & Clyde**

Glasgow & Clyde Rape Crisis Centre

### **Lanarkshire**

Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre

### **Moray**

Moray Rape Crisis

### **Orkney**

Orkney Rape & Sexual Assault Service

### **Perth**

Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre Perth & Kinross

### **Highland**

Rape & Sexual Abuse Service Highland

### **Scottish Borders**

Scottish Borders Rape Crisis Centre

### **Shetland**

Shetland Rape Crisis

### **Western Isles**

Western Isles Rape Crisis Centre



## Information for survivors of sexual violence in this series:

- Anger
- Coping after sexual violence
- Dissociation
- Flashbacks
- Healing from sexual violence
- Nightmares and sleeping problems
- Panic attacks
- Relationships
- Self-harm
- Sexual health
- Suicidal thoughts/feelings
- Trauma



Helpline: **08088 01 03 02**

Email: **support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

For information on your local rape crisis centre visit  
our website: **www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

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