

Personal Safety Tips for Women

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By Jamie Cohen via

Protect Yourself

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Some 1.9 million women are physically assaulted annually in the United States, and 15 percent to 25 percent of all American women will report a sexual attack or rape at some time in their lives, according to studies conducted by the Justice Department and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And experts say that because the majority of sexual assaults go unreported, the numbers from these studies may represent only a fraction of the violent of crimes against women.

But while these numbers may seem frighteningly high, safety authorities are quick to point out that women need not view themselves as helpless victims. ABCNEWS' Healthy Woman asked crime and safety specialists the most effective precautions a woman can take when walking alone to keep herself from becoming a statistic:

Dress to Kill. Clogs, high heels, and tight skirts are hard to run and fight in, while scarves and long necklaces are easy to grab. If possible, modify your fashion style or wear comfortable clothing when walking alone. You can always change into dress-up clothes later. Or, think through how you would fight in your dress-up clothes. Would you kick off your high heels or hike your skirt up around your hips to run or kick?

Make Eye Contact. It may be your first instinct to lower your gaze as you walk to your destination. But looking straight into the face of potential enemies is the better option. "Eye contact may scare off attackers because they fear you will be able to identify them," says Mary Ellen Burns, a spokesperson for the Boston Police Department.

Keep Eyes and Ears Open, Hands Free. It is important to be alert to who and what is around you. Talking on a cell phone or listening to headphones makes you easy prey for a predator. The only reason you should be using your mobile phone is notify a friend of your whereabouts or to call for help. Also, limit the number of bundles you have to carry by using a backpack or bag with a shoulder strap. This will ensure that your hands are free to defend.

Be Lazy, Take the Elevator Over the Stairs. And when in the elevator, stand in front of the doors, then if someone you feel uneasy about gets on with you, you can step off immediately.

Fight Your Inner Woman. Experts say that women tend to be sympathetic — don't be! History has shown that serial killers and other criminals often play on the sympathies of unsuspecting women to lure them into dangerous situations. If someone asks for the time, directions, or help in or around their car, be as courteous as possible but keep moving. You can always assist the stranger by making a phone call to police from a safe location, or by finding others to go back and help with you.

Change It Up. Regularly change your walking routine. Plan out a few different routes that you can take and mark out "safe houses" in your mind at intervals along the way. In the event of attacks, you can stop at these shops or homes where you know you will be safe. Try to incorporate these houses every time you vary your route

Be Paranoid and Suspicious. It is always better to be safe than sorry. When in a parking lot, look at the cars parked on either side of your vehicle. If a male in a vehicle is sitting alone in the seat nearest your car, or if you are parked next to a van, always enter your car from the side opposite the strange vehicle. If the parking lot is particularly dark or deserted, it may be wise to go back and find a friend or guard who can walk you to your car.

WHEN IT'S TOO LATE

If you have gotten yourself into a violent situation, the most important thing is to react immediately.

Run, Run, Run. If the predator has a gun but you are not under his control, take off. Experts say the predator will only hit you, a running target, four out of every 100 shots. And even then, it most likely will not be a vital organ.

Stay Put. Do not let your attacker take you to an abandoned area. If he does, the likelihood that you will be seriously injured increases tenfold, says Burns. You do not want to get to "crime scene number two" so do whatever it takes and never give up.

Hit the Attacker Where It Counts. The eyes, knees, throat and groin are very vulnerable, good places to gouge and kick. But listen to your instincts and try to determine if a counter

attack by you is the best approach. If you do decide to fight, make sure your first move is as forceful as possible. It may be your only hope.

Try Anything and Everything. Additional approaches are offering your wallet, jumping out at a stoplight, doing something to cause an accident, or signaling to other drivers. If you are thrown into the trunk of a car, experts advise you to kick out the back tail lights, stick your arm out the hole, and start waving wildly. The driver won't see you but everyone else will. This trick is said to have saved lives.

Safety Tips compiled from contributions by; Jayne Hitchcock, president of Women Halting Online Abuse, Mary Ellen Burns, spokesperson for the Boston Police Department, and The Women's Safety Project, a non-profit organization founded to provide self-defense information to women and girls.

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