

SAFETY TIPS FOR WOMEN WALKING ALONE



Presented by



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Protecting Yourself Isn't an Option—It's a Priority

According to The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), a sexual assault occurs every 107 seconds in the United States. And while that's an uncomfortable and horrifying statistic, simply being upset about it doesn't protect you.

There are, however, steps you can take to protect yourself and to lower the risk of assault. Let's take a look at a few of the things that are within your control.

Plan Ahead

One of the best ways to prevent assaults is to avoid situations where they take place. That, however, often requires planning ahead. When you're headed to work or to the mall or to run errands, think about where you want to park before you arrive. Train yourself to look for a well-lit spot that offers easy access to your building or to the store you want to enter.

The same thing applies to leaving and getting to your car. Before you leave your building or a store, make sure you have everything you need within easy grasp (including keys with an alarm). You don't want to be fumbling with keys, or your phone or your purse on your way to your care. You want to be paying attention to your surroundings. So don't be in a hurry. Take a minute to collect your thoughts and your belongings. Before you step out the door.

Be Observant

One of the most important things you can do as a woman walking alone is to be aware of your surroundings. Often we're so focused on getting where we want to go that all we see is what's right in front of us. Sure, you're busy, but don't be in such a hurry that you don't take time to look around and assess your surroundings.

Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable or nervous? Can you see a clear path to your car or to your building or are there areas where someone could lurk—hidden from sight? Are there other people around (yes, there is safety in numbers)? Are there people around who make you feel uneasy?

Be Equipped

There are online sites that offer all kinds of equipment designed to keep women safe. But sometimes, just "arming" yourself with simple items such as keys that have a "panic alarm," a whistle, some pepper spray and even a flashlight can provide what you need. Besides, just carrying protection devices may make you think you're safe, but if you're not trained to use them—or aren't prepared to use them—they aren't that helpful.



Consider a Self-Defense Class

Preparing yourself (both in terms of physical ability and the right mindset) can be a big help. A study by a sociologist at the University of Oregon in 2013 found that women who participated in a ten-week self-defense training course were significantly less likely to experience unwanted sexual contact than those who didn't.

Don't Go Alone

This may seem like awfully simple advice—but it's a great deterrent. If possible, walk to and from your car with friends, acquaintances, or coworkers. You don't have to chat, but again, there is safety in numbers. Sometimes at places such as hospitals, a security guard may be available to walk you to your car when it's late. If you're uncomfortable, don't hesitate to ask.

Don't Be Too Predictable

Vary your routine. Sometimes assaults are the result of someone watching and observing your patterns. This allows them to attack in areas where you may be most vulnerable (such as dark places or areas where there are fewer people around). If you're not walking with a group, you may want to change your route once in a while. For one thing, it tends to make you more observant of what's around you—and it can prevent someone from scoping out your route and finding a hiding place.

Avoid False Security Myths

Sometimes women develop a false sense of security because they are misinformed about how to stay safe. There are certain myths that persist about how a woman can/should protect herself against attackers. A woman may think that she can reason with an attacker (which doesn't work because an attacker isn't adhering to the same social rules of conduct).

Some women are convinced that if they are generally fit they are safer. But there's a big difference between being fit and knowing how to defend yourself. There are those women who are convinced that if they conquer their fears they'll be able to out-think their attacker. That only works if you know exactly how to defend yourself (and actually disable your attacker).

Being mentally prepared is important, but there really are times when it's not all in your head. And thinking that you have things under control can cause you to ignore some of the other things listed here that can help you avoid dealing with an attack in the first place.

Nobody likes to think about the possibility of assault. Thinking about it, however, and taking precautionary steps can be the best way of avoiding it.

