

Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault – DFSA

(also called Drug Assisted Sexual Assault or DASA)

What is DFSA?

DFSA is the term used to describe any type of sexual harm (sexual assault, sexual violence or rape) that occurs whilst the person is either drunk or intoxicated with alcohol and/or drugs. It doesn't matter whether you took the alcohol or drugs voluntarily, or unknowingly (as in "drink spiking"): either way, it is NEVER OK for anyone to have sexual contact with you without your consent, whatever the circumstances.

Sometimes the person who commits DFSA is a complete stranger, but often they are an acquaintance, friend, partner or ex-partner. No matter who the person is, it is NEVER OK. As with all types of sexual harm, DFSA can happen to anyone – of any gender, background or age.

It is difficult to know how common DFSA is, as alcohol and many of the drugs used leave the body quickly, making them hard to detect, but we suspect it is quite common.

What "drugs" are used?



Alcohol is the most common "drug" associated with sexual harm. It isn't always easy to know how much you have had to drink, or what the effects of that amount of alcohol might be - the effects can vary depending on what type of alcohol you drink, how quickly you drink it, whether or not you have food, and if you combine it with any other drugs.

After suspected DFSA, some people tell us that they had been drinking voluntarily prior to the assault but feel as though their drink was "spiked" with stronger alcohol (this is particularly a risk if someone buys you a drink, or offers you a drink you don't recognise, like a glass of punch or a cocktail).

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Other drugs that can be associated with DFSA, either in combination with alcohol or on their own, include:

- Sedatives, such as sleeping pills
- Anti-anxiety medications such as benzodiazepines
- Ketamine, a type of anaesthetic
- GHB and GBL
- Cannabis, synthetics and other recreational drugs

In some cases, these drugs might have been used for either medical or recreational purposes by the victim, whilst in other cases they may have been given them unknowingly. Whatever the situation, it is NEVER OK for this to happen.



What are the effects on the body?

The effects depend a lot on what type, quantity and combination of alcohol or other drugs were used.

Commonly reported effects include:

- Drowsiness or even being deeply asleep
- Lack of memory of the events – some people won't remember anything at all, whilst for others patchy memory might return weeks or even months after the event
- Impaired judgement
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Slurred speech
- Paralysis of muscles
- Poor co-ordination
- Blurry vision
- Disorientation and confusion
- Hallucinations

Because of the confusion and memory loss, some people can't remember anything about what happened to them and may be unable to recall how the evening ended or how they got home. They may just feel like "something is wrong" or that someone has had sexual contact with them. If this has happened to you, contact *Safe to Talk*, the 24/7 sexual harm helpline, or your local support agency as listed on SAATS-Link (contact details for Safe to Talk and SAATS-Link are at the bottom of this leaflet), and ask for advice – they will be able to refer you to someone who can talk you through your options, and provide you with medical care such as emergency contraception and infection prevention if needed.

Delay in seeking help after suspected DFSA is very common

It can take time for a person to realise that something may have happened and to think through what kind of help or support they would like. Police, Crisis Support and Specialist Medical Teams understand this and will never judge or criticise you for not seeking help sooner.

This is a complicated issue, but it is important for you to know that you may not be able to find out what happened. Sometimes there may be signs on a physical exam or results of blood and urine tests that can provide some answers, but it is more common for this to not be the case.

This is not a reason to decide not to get help though.

Whenever you manage to seek help, you will get all the care and support you need and will not be judged or criticised for any delay.

Reporting to the Police

As with all types of sexual harm, the Police treat DFSA very seriously. As many of the drugs that can be associated with DFSA leave the body in a matter of hours, if you do want to talk to the Police it is sensible to do this as soon as you are able to. This will give them a better chance of detecting any drugs that may be in your system. The Police can refer you to a specialist sexual assault medical team who will take samples of blood and urine for drug detection, as well as providing you with any medical care you need. Hair samples that can detect drugs can also be taken several weeks and even months after suspected DFSA, so it is still worth talking to the Police later on if you would like to.

Talking to the Police initially doesn't mean that you can't change your mind later on – they are there to help and support you, whatever you decide you would like to do.

Getting medical help and support

Whether or not you want to involve the Police, a Specialist Medical Team is available to help you access the care and support you need. The link to SAATS-Link will show you a map of medical sexual assault clinics around the country, and how to get in touch with your nearest support agency if you want counselling or advice at a later stage; or you can contact *Safe to Talk*, the 24/7 sexual harm helpline for immediate support (contact details at the bottom of this leaflet).

The medical team will do a health check-up and will provide you with emergency contraception and infection prevention medicines as needed. They may also be able to take forensic samples for the Police if you think you may want to involve them at some stage, either now or in the future.

Recovery

For most people who have experienced sexual harm, the physical symptoms are short-lived. In a few days, most of the effects of alcohol and/or drugs should have left the body, and if injuries were present they will have started to heal.

For some people though, the emotional and mental effects can be far more severe and long-lasting.

Contrary to what a lot of people think, it is usually not comforting to have no or partial memory for a period of time. It can be very upsetting imagining what may or may not have happened. Most people do not regain any significant memory of the "lost period" of time. In fact, some people never regain any memory of the events. It is important for you and those who are supporting you to know this. You should not put pressure on yourself or feel pressure from others to try and regain your memory.

It is really important you have a space where you can be safely supported and listened to. Everyone in New Zealand who has experienced sexual harm is entitled to ACC funded counselling, and most regions have specialised support agencies such as Rape Crisis or HELP who can guide you through this process.

Support

For more information about support available, follow the links below.

Safe to talk Sexual harm helpline – speak with a trained specialist 24/7:

- Freephone: [0800 044 334](tel:0800044334)
- Text: [4334](tel:4334)
- Website/online chat: www.safetotalk.nz
- Email: support@safetotalk.nz

SAATS-Link Find your nearest sexual assault medical service or local crisis support service: www.saats-link.nz

NZ Police Read information for victims of sexual assault:
<http://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/victims-sexual-assault-booklet.pdf>

View short films on care and support options after sexual assault:
<http://www.police.govt.nz/advice/sexual-assault/video-resources>

ACC See how ACC can support you (funded counselling):
<https://www.acc.co.nz/assets/im-injured/acc7115-find-sexual-violence-support.pdf>