

# FIGHT BACK AGAINST RAPE - WITH FEAR!

## Black Belt Magazine

Rape. It's a four letter word that hurls women into the basement of their fears. And it's every parent's unspoken fear for their daughter.

You can't always see it but it's there, crimping women's sense of freedom. "When I walk home in the evening, I am gripped by a hyper vigilance that creates great tension in my body and runs a fast-paced tape of warnings and nightmare scenarios through my mind," wrote one student. Her anxieties are echoed by countless others: two-thirds of American women "do not feel safe."



Some call it paranoia, but the fear of sexual assault isn't unfounded. The most underreported crime in America, it is estimated that 12.1 million American women have been the victim of "forcible rape" and that 1 out of 8 will be assaulted in her lifetime. An age-old crime, rape often encompasses sexual or psychological torture; a woman's terror and pain becomes little more than fodder for a predator's amusement.

When in the presence of this evil intent, you know it, immediately - it's nightmarish sensation is primal, hard-wired. An icy chill, then panic ricochets through your body, catapulting you into a Darwinian jungle of predator and prey. It shatters the veneer of civilization and connects you to the terror of becoming a sacrificial lamb.

The aftermath of rape can be devastating, profoundly altering a woman's sense of self at the core. Far more than a heinous crime against one's body, survivors often describe it as a "shattering" experience.

No woman is immune, yet few are prepared.

Years ago, women were taught to rely on the Good Guys to protect them from the Bad Guys - a dangerously flawed strategy as women are typically alone when assaulted. (Plus that Good Guy / Bad Guy line can get blurry fast if Jeckyll plays switcheroo with Hyde.) Being rescued is a comforting thought, but as reliable as divine intervention.

### Putting The Controversy To Rest

Studies have finally dispelled the myth that women are unable to protect themselves and that resistance will only "make things worse," replacing this erroneous claim with newfound data: immediate and aggressive responses including fighting back

**are** effective. Conversely pleading, reasoning or appealing to a rapist's humanity is not - the latter being "almost universally futile," notes Dr. Judith Herman, foremost authority on trauma and author of the best selling book *Trauma and Recovery*.

"By not resisting rape, women may be putting themselves at greater risk," says Sarah Ullman, assistant professor from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Of course fighting carries risks, but Ullman's research on resistance strategies concluded that a woman's "level of physical injury is mainly determined by the offender's use of violence" and initial blows struck, not because she fought back.

Having choices and defense skills may also be critical in the aftermath. "The women who fought to the best of their abilities were not only more likely to be successful in thwarting the rape attempt, but less likely to suffer severe distress symptoms," wrote Herman. "By contrast, women who submitted without a struggle were more likely to be highly self critical and depressed in the aftermath."

More good reasons why women need to learn how to counterattack. But before we get to essential strategies, we need to appreciate the dual nature of fear.

### **A Package Deal**

Fear is a double agent, both ally and enemy, informant and saboteur. You cannot control fear, but how you react to it. It can save or imperil, empower or enslave you.

A primeval emotion, fear is hard-wired into our survival instinct. It alerts us to danger and is the voice of intuition. It elicits that *uh-oh* feeling that tells you to get moving and triggers the adrenaline dump prepping the body for action. Honoring this emotion has saved many lives. "The moment he got in my car, I was flooded with fear," one woman later remarked. (He' is a sicko who orchestrated a parking lot mugging then 'rescued' her so that, indebted, she would drive him to his vehicle.) After tricking him into stepping out of her car, she swiftly drove off and discovered the rape kit - knives, rope, duct tape — in his attaché case.

But women are equally vulnerable to becoming victims of fear, immobilized by its grip.

### **The Myth Of Fearlessness**

Fearlessness has been touted as the Holy Grail of the warrior arts. It's a seductive notion, but nothing could be more dangerous nor further from the truth. "Saying that you don't feel fear is like saying that you don't feel hunger, thirst, love or hate. Everyone feels emotion, fear being one of the most powerful," writes the legendary former bouncer Geoff Thompson in his book *Fear: The Friend of Exceptional People*.

The goal of any fighting art should never be to eliminate fear (reduce it, yes) but rather to replace helplessness with skills, and to re-train the body and mind to respond and react instantaneously. Without fear there is no courage nor urgency of action. It isn't fear per se, but hesitation that is the enemy.

When it comes to rape, there's no mincing the truth: being slammed down and pinned by a larger, pumped up creature intent on raping or ravaging you will, at

least initially, evoke abject animal-like terror and can quickly suck the life force right out of one's body. No amount of warrior-within affirmations is going to change that or banish fear. Fear does not respond to, nor is it abated by, trickery — it is a deeper more purposeful emotion, ordained by Mother Nature. As was poignantly rendered by Ambrose Redmoon, "Only an enemy can initiate a warrior."

### **Beyond Hope And Fear**

To effectively fend off a rapist, and not be immobilized by fear one must prioritize. The decision to not be raped, to escape and survive, must supersede all other concerns including the fear of injury — the biggest obstacle to fighting back. "If what you fear more than anything else is injury," says survival expert Sanford Strong, "you will not have the determination to escape an attack. You will believe all the criminal's promises and never notice fleeting opportunities."

Rape is essentially an act of terrorism. A rapist can hold a woman hostage with her very own fears, and will effectively use a woman's terror to gain compliance and render her powerless - "bought and paid for," attests Strong. The debilitating effects of fear resound in writer Sally Kempton's words: "It is hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head."

### **Piercing The Heart Of Terror**

It can happen in a heart beat, but the prime directive to fight back takes place, not just in the mind or body's adrenal system, but on a deeper more spiritual level, set into motion by this bottom line decision: what is non-negotiable. It is this innermost decision that issues a woman's resolve, evoking the requisite will and wrath that compels her into battle, her spirit leading her body.

This flicker of reckoning can antidote potentially lethal passivity and spawn an indomitable fighting spirit, paradoxically liberated from both hope and fear. Crossing this threshold leaves many to later remark: I didn't know I had it in me; something inside rose up and said NO; that's when I went for it.

Instead of succumbing to fear, we need to use it as a weapon. Sensations of fear and adrenaline must become the trigger that catapults women into action. You must learn to turn the rapist's own weapons of intimidation — the vehemence of his words and actions - back onto him in a merciless counterattack that I call "return to sender." A strategy that embodies the true spirit of reversal.

To combat rape and increase your fighting chances, arm yourself with these essential strategies:

1. **Recognize when you are being "tested" or "interviewed" and break away immediately.** Predators often test a woman's boundaries to gain proximity and size up her defenses. (This can occur in a few seconds or over months; preceded by a simple request for directions or persistent unwanted courting.) Violating boundaries is what criminals have majored in. A predator maybe thinking: "If I can get this close, I can move in closer. If I can get her money / make her comply with one demand, I can help myself to more." Do not enable this progression of "Yeses." Take control and nip problems in the

bud. Learn to draw a line, to say NO and mean it. Don't be duped by ploys - listen to your gut. Yell. Make a scene. Throw the dog a bone and escape. Never trade in your back bone for a wish bone.

2. **If you are pinned or rendered immobile and cannot immediately resist, take the first opening you get.** You may not get a second chance. Rape can abruptly escalate to a more violent, life-threatening attack such as severe beating, stabbing or murder. In the quandary of risk it now or risk it later, sooner is almost always the better option.

The instant he fumbles with his / your clothing, changes positions or shifts his weight, puts down a weapon, places his hands on your torso, or prepares to strike or use a weapon - ATTACK! Distractions such as "there's money / drugs on the dresser" sometimes work, but don't count on it; be prepared to seize existing slivers of opportunity.

Some rapists initially establish dominance or force women into harrowing positions. Instead of ineffectually struggling against brute strength, relaxing the body can help create explosive opportunity. "His knee was dug into my back. I thought my back would break," described one woman, her terror mounting. Instinctively she "went limp" - this makes it easier to spring - which enabled her to flip over, counterattack and flee.

3. **If forced to wait, remain focused on the inside.** Collect yourself. Think: what part of my body is free... what targets are presenting... where is the exit... his knife? To help counteract a racing mind and heart, lower your "center" and concentrate your breathing in your belly.

Emotions and adrenaline will quickly flood the body and can induce panic or paralysis. Adrenaline is a key factor here. It's function is to prep you for fight or flight — for action, not inaction. Thompson likens adrenaline to "fuel injection or turbo drive" in a sports car. Once it is dumped into the body if you do not or cannot act, it can be "gobbled up by increasing panic. Like the car," he says, "you will be pressing the accelerator but without engaging the clutch." If action is stifled this energy may be utilized negatively; the rushes of adrenaline misinterpreted as fear.

More reasons to resist immediately before this collusion has it's way with you or induces "tonic immobility"- a clinical term amounting to paralysis. When one is rendered helpless or paralyzed, altered states of consciousness such as dissociation, "splitting off" or leaving one's body often take over. These are powerful *internal* survival mechanisms, designed to mitigate trauma, protect the psyche and stave off pain. But it simultaneously fosters a *disembodied* state making it difficult to mobilize energetic resistance.

4. **Do not test the waters.** Unlike stand up aggression, there's no wiggle room for that feint or evasive maneuver. Make your opening move count without telegraphing your intention. Initially, depending on a rapist's MO and level of violence, you might be able to lower his aggressive arousal - or at least his guard - by calmly talking to him or through physical contact (ideally placing a hand near the inside of his elbow or on his knee, giving you potential leverage and control.) This also gets him used to seeing your hands so he won't think

twice when you suddenly stab his face. When it's time to unload, explode at a hundred and ten percent.

5. **Attack vulnerable regions.** To commit a rape, an offender's face or groin will likely be in your strike zone at some point. Viciously attack whatever he sticks out. Use dirty tactics: bite, gouge, seize-and-squeeze, slam, pound and pummel. After twisting and crushing his not-so-private parts, one older woman literally threw her rapist out of her house. A recently released felon, the police found him at home with ice packs on his groin. It took a jury seven minutes to convict him.
6. **Use Your Hips and Legs To "Get Him Off!"** A woman's legs are her strongest natural weapons and can be used like battering rams to vital regions. But you may have to free them first. If an attacker is lying on or straddling your hips, plant a foot and heave or buck him off, or trap his lower leg and roll (to aid such displacement, simultaneously attack the face). Other methods involve swinging your hips (think: tailbone) out sideways, or using your knees to keep him at bay until you can deliver more devastating kicks. If an offender is to the side of your body, or sitting on you upright, you might be able to hook his head or shoulders with your leg(s) and slam him down. From on "all fours" a woman can explosively drop onto her side then fire-off righteous combinations of side, thrust or ax kicks. Remember: your goal is to facilitate escape, not force him into submission.
7. **Obey the nevers: Never allow yourself to be tied up or taken to a secondary crime scene - whether forced into a vehicle or dragged behind a building.** The statistics get grim: at a second, more isolated location, an assailant will have far more control over you. Go ballistic — immediately! Attack like a wolverine, but don't go with.

Never give up. Another opening or stroke of luck may present itself. The body is more resilient than we think. Plenty of women have been cut or shot but live to tell the story.

#### **BOTTOM LINE**

Sexual sacrifice is a lousy choice no woman should have to confront.

But in the end, Thompson is right: if you're going to fight, "KNOW FEAR"

-Dr Ruthless