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1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Emergency Contraception

Q: What is emergency contraception (or emergency birth control)?

A: Emergency contraception, or emergency birth control, is used to help keep a woman from getting pregnant after she has had unprotected sex (sex without using birth control).

Use emergency contraception if:

- You didn't use birth control
- You were forced to have sex
- The condom broke or came off
- He didn't pull out in time
- You missed two or more birth control pills in a row
- You were late getting your shot

Emergency contraception should not be used as regular birth control. Other birth control methods are much better at keeping women from becoming pregnant. Talk with your doctor to decide which one is right for you.

Q: How does emergency contraception work?

A: Emergency contraception can keep you from becoming pregnant by:

- Keeping the egg from leaving the ovary
- OR
- Keeping the sperm from meeting the egg
- OR

- Keeping the fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus (womb)

If you are already pregnant, emergency contraception will NOT work.

Q: What are the types of emergency contraception?

A: There are two types:

- Emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs)
- Intrauterine devices (IUDs)

ECPs contain higher doses of the same hormones in some brands of regular birth control pills. Some ECPs are "combined ECPs" with progestin and estrogen. Others are progestin-only. If you are breastfeeding or if you can't take estrogen, you should use Progestin-only ECPs. **You should always take ECPs as soon as you can after having sex**, but they can work up to five days later. There are two types of ECPs:

- **Plan B (progestin-only)** — made for use as emergency contraception. The two pills can be taken in two doses (one pill right away, and the next pill 12 hours later), or both pills can be taken at the same time. Some women feel sick and throw up after taking ECPs. Taking both pills at the same time will not increase your chances of having these side effects. If you throw up after taking ECPs, call your doctor or pharmacist.
- **Higher dose of regular birth control pills** — The number of pills in a dose is different for each pill brand, and not all brands can be used for emergency contraception. For more information on birth control pills that can be used for emer-



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gency contraception, visit Not-2-Late.com. The pills are taken in two doses (one dose right away, and the next dose 12 hours later). Always use the same brand for both doses. Some women feel sick and throw up after taking ECPs. If you throw up after taking ECPs, call your doctor or pharmacist.

The other type of emergency contraception is the IUD. The IUD is a T-shaped, plastic device placed into the uterus (womb) by a doctor within five days after having sex.

The IUD works by:

- Keeping the sperm from meeting the egg
- OR
- Keeping the egg from attaching to the uterus (womb)

Your doctor can remove the IUD after your next period. Or, it can be left in place for up to 10 years to use as your regular birth control.

Q: Are emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) the same thing as the “morning after pill”?

A: Yes. ECPs are often called the “morning after pill,” which is wrong because ECPs are never taken as only one pill and they don’t have to be taken the morning after. **You should always take ECPs as soon as you can after having unprotected sex (sex without using birth control),** but they can work up to five days later.

Q: How do I get emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs)?

A: Plan B (progestin-only) was recently approved to be sold over-the-counter

to women who are 18 years of age or older. Women under the age of 18 will need a prescription. Women will have to show proof of age to buy Plan B. Plan B will be sold at pharmacies or stores that have a licensed pharmacist on staff by the end of 2006.

Q: Can I get emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) before I need them?

A: Yes. Your doctor should bring up ECPs at your annual exam (when you have a pap smear or pap test). If your doctor does not talk about emergency contraception at your next exam, ask for it.

Q: Will ECPs protect me from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?

A: No. ECPs can only keep you from becoming pregnant. Always use condoms to lower your risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease.

Q: What do I need to do after I take emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs)?

A: Take the ECPs exactly as your doctor or pharmacist tells you to. If you see another doctor or nurse for any reason after taking ECPs, tell him/her that you have taken ECPs.

Some women feel sick and throw up after taking ECPs. This side effect happens more often with pills that contain both estrogen and progestin. Your doctor or pharmacist can give you medication to help control sickness. If you throw up after taking ECPs, call your doctor or pharmacist. After you have taken ECPs, your next period may come sooner or later than normal. Your



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period also may be heavier, lighter, or more spotty than normal. **Use another birth control method if you have sex any time before your next period starts.**

If you do not get your period in 3 weeks or if you think you might be pregnant after taking ECPs, consider getting a pregnancy test just to make sure you're not pregnant.

Q: Does emergency contraception work all the time?

A: No. Emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) that contain both estrogen and progestin are about 75 percent effective at keeping a woman from getting pregnant. In other words, if 100 women had unprotected sex (sex without using birth control) in the fertile part of their cycle (when an egg is most likely to leave the ovary), about 8 of those women would become pregnant. If all 100 women took combined emergency contraceptive pills, only 2 would become pregnant. ECPs containing only progestin are about 89 percent effective. If those same 100 women took progestin-only ECPs, only 1 would become pregnant. The IUD is 99.9 percent effective. If 1,000 women had an IUD put in, only one would become pregnant.

The sooner you take emergency contraception after sex, the better your chances it will work.

Q: My girlfriend took emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) and they did not work. If she stays pregnant, will there be something wrong with her baby?

A: No. Studies have been done with women who did not know they were pregnant and kept taking birth control pills. These studies have found no greater risk for birth defects. Your girlfriend should see a doctor right away to talk about her options.

Q: Is emergency contraception the same thing as the "abortion pill?"

A: No. Emergency contraception can keep a woman from becoming pregnant. It works one of three ways:

- By keeping the egg from leaving the ovary
- By keeping the sperm from meeting the egg
- By keeping the fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus (womb)

The abortion pill (Mifeprex, also called RU-486) works after a woman becomes pregnant (after a fertilized egg has attached to the uterus). The abortion pill makes the uterus force out the egg, ending the pregnancy. ■



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For More Information...

You can find out more about emergency contraception by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) 1-800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

Food and Drug Administration

Phone Number(s): (888) INFO-FDA

(1-888-463-6332)

Internet Address: <http://www.fda.gov/>

Emergency Contraception Hotline and Website

Phone Number(s): (888) NOT-2-LATE

(1-888-668-2528)

Internet Address: <http://ec.princeton.edu>

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Phone Number(s): (800) 230-PLAN

(1-800-230-7526)

To order materials: (800) 669-0156

Internet Address:

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

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