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EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION (PILLS)

What is Emergency Contraception?

Pregnancy can be prevented *after* intercourse by taking Emergency Contraceptive pills (EC). EC is commonly known as the “Morning After” Pill. It works by giving the body a short, high, burst of synthetic hormones. This disrupts hormone patterns needed for pregnancy. EC disturbs the ovaries and the development of the uterine lining, making pregnancy less likely. EC is used within 120 hours (5 days) after intercourse. It is most effective within the first 24 hours. Emergency Contraception is 75-89% effective. EC does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

Use

The first dose of EC is taken within 120 hours of unprotected intercourse. The second dose is taken 12 hours later. EC may be taken after 120 hours, but its effectiveness is much lower.

If you vomit within a half hour of taking EC, call your clinic. Vomiting can decrease the effectiveness of EC. To decrease nausea and vomiting take an anti-vomiting medication 30 minutes before taking the first dose. Some over the counter medications include Benadryl and Dramamine. Take as directed on the package. Both can cause drowsiness. When using birth control pills for EC take with food, preferably a full meal.

Brands of Pills

Plan B is one brand of EC. It has two progesterone pills.

Birth control pills that have both estrogen and progesterone can also be used for EC. Choose only one type of pill to take for EC. To the right is the dosage information for some common brands of birth control pills. Some birth control packages have several different colors. It is important to take the exact color on this chart. Brands not listed have not been tested for their effectiveness.

After taking EC, your next menstrual period should begin within 2 or 3 weeks. After two weeks, you can take a

pregnancy test. If your period does not come within 3 weeks or if you are pregnant, visit your clinic.

Taking birth control pills *after* EC

Start a new pack of pills on the first day of your menstrual period or on the Sunday after the first day of your period. Take one pill every day.

Type of Pill	1 st Dose Take within 120 hours of intercourse	2 nd Dose Take 12 hours after first dose
Plan B	1 pill	1 pill
Type of Birth Control Pill	1 st Dose Take within 120 hours of intercourse	2 nd Dose Take 12 hours after first dose
Alesse	5 pink pills	5 pink pills
Levlen	4 orange pills	4 orange pills
Lo-Ovral	4 white pills	4 white pills
Ovral	2 white pills	2 white pills
Nordette	4 orange pills	4 orange pills
Tri-Levlen	4 yellow pills	4 yellow pills
Triphasil	4 yellow pills	4 yellow pills

Your Health

Every woman is different. Due to the risk of serious health problems, women with the following conditions may not be able to use Emergency Contraception:

- ◆ Established pregnancy
- ◆ Past heart attack or stroke
- ◆ Blood clots in the legs or lungs
- ◆ Breast or genital cancers
- ◆ Liver cancer

EC may not be recommended for women who plan to have intercourse within 5 days, are breastfeeding or have given birth in the last 6 weeks, have epilepsy, cardiovascular or kidney disease, migraine headaches, diabetes, or hypertension. Call your clinic to ask if EC is safe for you.

EC does not harm an established pregnancy. It acts on the uterus and cannot prevent an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilized egg attaches and grows outside the uterus. This can be very dangerous and requires immediate medical attention. To protect your health, watch out for the EC danger signs.

Side Effects

Common side effects for women who use birth control pills for EC are nausea, vomiting, headaches, breast tenderness, dizziness, fluid retention and irregular bleeding. These side effects usually disappear after 1-2 days. Side effects are rare when Plan B is used.

Danger Signs

Women who experience any of the following symptoms while taking EC should call the clinic immediately:

- A**bdominal pains (severe)
- C**hest pain or shortness of breath
- H**eadaches (severe)
- E**ye problems, such as blurred vision
- S**evere leg or arm pain or numbness

Future Fertility

EC does not prevent future pregnancies and is less effective than other methods of birth control. If you want to prevent future pregnancies, condoms and spermicide are easily available options. You can buy them over the counter and you don't have to wait for the start of your next period.

Availability

EC pills require a prescription. However, in Washington State, you can get EC from many pharmacies without a clinic visit. You can call ahead to make sure the pharmacist on duty is trained to dispense EC. To find out the provider closest to you, contact the nationwide **EC Hotline** at **1-800-584-9911**. The hotline is available 24 hours a day in Spanish and English. You can visit their website at ec.princeton.edu or find more information by searching for emergency contraception on the internet.

Keep Pills On Hand!

Go ahead - ask your doctor or pharmacist to give you the pills or the prescription ahead of time. Then you'll have EC before you need it.

Advantages

- ◆ Can be used *after* intercourse.
- ◆ Can use regular birth control pills.
- ◆ Can get pills ahead of time.
- ◆ Easy to use.
- ◆ Does not affect future fertility.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Must be taken within 120 hours.
- ◆ Side effects include nausea.
- ◆ Must be readily available.

IUD for Emergency Contraception

Within one week of unprotected intercourse, an Intrauterine Device (IUD) can be used to prevent pregnancy. An IUD is a small device that is inserted through the cervix and placed in the uterus. Copper IUDs affect the uterine lining, making the uterus hostile to sperm and preventing fertilization and implantation. Getting an IUD requires a clinic visit. Call your health provider for more information.

Further Resources

Cedar River Clinics: www.CedarRiverClinics.org

Contraception and Sex Information You Can Actually Use: www.io.com/~wwwomen/contraception/

Emergency Contraception: ec.princeton.edu

Back Up Your Birth Control at www.backupyourbirthcontrol.org

Feminist Women's Health Center at www.FWHC.org and www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info