
Get the facts about...

Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP)

What are emergency contraceptive pills?

Emergency contraceptive pills are commonly known as the “Morning After Pill”. These pills contain high doses of the hormones estrogen and progestin, or progestin only. Plan B® is a progestin only ECP.

How do I use ECP?

Emergency contraceptive pills are used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse or failed contraception (i.e. broken condom). The pills are taken in 2 doses, 12 hours apart. Or you can take both pills at once.

Who can take ECP?

Most women can use emergency contraceptive pills safely. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist to learn whether there is any reason you cannot take them.

How effective are emergency contraceptive pills?

Emergency contraceptive pills are highly effective if taken in the first 72 hours after unprotected intercourse, especially within 24 hours. They can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected intercourse or failed contraception. Effectiveness decreases as time passes. Take the pills as soon as possible.

How does ECP work?

Depending on when you use emergency contraceptive pills during your cycle, the pills will either stop or delay the release of an egg. They also alter cervical mucus and the lining of the uterus. Emergency contraceptive pills won't work if a woman is already pregnant.

Where do I get emergency contraceptive pills?

There are two ways to get Plan B:

- Speak to a pharmacist. You don't need a prescription.
- Go to a doctor for a prescription. It may cost you less to buy this way.

If ECP does not work, and I become pregnant, will the pregnancy be normal?

Based on available information, there is no reason to believe that the pregnancy would be affected.

What are the side effects?

The most common side effect is nausea. Some women may experience vomiting. Other side effects may include breast tenderness, bleeding between periods, headache, dizziness and tiredness. These side effects will usually go away one or two days after you have taken the second dose. Women are usually given an anti-nausea medication (e.g. Gravol) with the emergency contraceptive pills.

What if vomiting occurs?

You may want to eat some soda crackers or drink a glass of milk 30 minutes before you take each dose in order to avoid vomiting. Your doctor or pharmacist may also recommend an anti-nausea medication. You can take the anti-nausea medication an hour before you take the first dose of emergency contraceptive pills. This may reduce nausea. If you vomit within one hour after taking a dose, call your doctor or pharmacist. You may need to repeat the dose.

When will I get my next period?

You will get your period earlier or later than your usual period. Usually you get your period 1-3 weeks after taking Plan B. Your period may be heavier, lighter or more spotty than usual. If you still do not get your period three weeks after taking ECP, you need to have a pregnancy test.

Remember...

- Emergency contraceptive pills are used for one time emergency protection only, for the prevention of unwanted pregnancy. They are not intended for use as a regular birth control method. You must use other methods of birth control to prevent pregnancy during the rest of your cycle.
- Emergency contraceptive pills do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If there is a chance that you might have gotten an STI from unprotected intercourse, you need to think about getting an STI test.
- Protect yourself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as from pregnancy. Use a condom every time you have sexual intercourse.

Note: *For emergency contraception, an IUD can be inserted into the uterus within 7 days of unprotected intercourse or failed contraception.*

Choosing birth control...

There are two ways to enjoy sex without getting pregnant....sex other than vaginal intercourse or vaginal intercourse with birth control. The use of birth control is an individual and private matter. It affects your body, relationships and lifestyle. There is no perfect choice in birth control. Get the facts you need and talk to people you trust. Always use latex or polyurethane condoms along with your birth control method to lower your chance of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Where to get more information:

You can get more information from your public health nurse, community health clinic, doctor or pharmacist. You can also call the *Facts of Life Line* to talk about birth control, sexuality, relationships, STIs and pregnancy options. **Call the Facts of Life Line at 947-9222 in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-432-1957.**

You can also check out these websites: <http://www.serc.mb.ca>;
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/emergency-contraception-morning-after-pill-4363.htm>