

What You Should Know About ...

Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)

What is ECP?

- ECP is an emergency contraception medication used to prevent pregnancy *after* sex when you didn't use birth control or the birth control didn't work (for example, the condom broke).
- It comes as two pills.
- Some people call it "the Morning After Pill".
- The brand currently available is called "Plan B".
- You can get ECP at pharmacies and community health clinics. You don't need a prescription.

Who can take ECP?

- Almost all women can take ECP safely.
- You should NOT use ECP if you know you are pregnant (mainly because it won't work).

Note: If you think you are pregnant from other unprotected sex that happened over a week ago, consider getting a pregnancy test first before using ECP. Pregnancy tests are available at any pharmacy, doctor, or community health clinic.

What counts as unprotected sex?

Unprotected sex includes the following:

- You had sex but weren't using any birth control, or the birth control you used may not have worked.
- A condom broke, or fell off, and you weren't using any other birth control.
- You missed two or more birth control pills in a pack.
- You were more than a week late for your birth control injection ("Depo-Provera").

Note: ECP also can be used if you were forced to have sex. If this happens, call the Sexual Assault Crisis Line at 786-8631 or 1-888-292-7565.

When should I take ECP?

- Swallow the 2 pills together as soon as possible.
- If you take 2 pills at once you do NOT need to take any more pills later on.
- This method is different than what the package says to do, but we know it works as well as taking the 2 pills separately.

What will ECP do?

- If taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex, it will reduce the chances of pregnancy by about 95%.
- If taken within 48 hours of unprotected sex, it will reduce the chances of pregnancy by about 85%.
- If taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, it will reduce the chances of pregnancy by about 58%.
- ECP may work up to 5 days after unprotected sex.
- You can expect a period within 1-3 weeks of taking ECP. See your health care provider for a pregnancy test if you don't get a period within 3 weeks

What will ECP not do?

- ECP will NOT prevent pregnancy all of the time.
- ECP will NOT stop a pregnancy if you're already pregnant.
- ECP will NOT protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV or AIDS.

Are there any side effects?

Serious side effects are rare. Minor side effects could include:

- Bleeding or spotting between periods
- Your period may come at a different time than usual
- Nausea (feeling sick to the stomach) and vomiting (puking)
- Abdominal (stomach) pain
- Headache or feeling tired

Can I take anything to stop feeling sick?

- Most women don't feel nausea or do not vomit after taking ECP, but you can take a half or a whole anti-nausea pill (Gravol, 50 mg pill) 30 minutes before taking ECP to prevent vomiting (puking).
- If you do vomit within 1 hour after taking the pills, they might not work; and you should try to take 2 more pills.

Can I take ECP whenever I have unprotected sex?

- Use ECP as emergency contraception only.
- Using ECP frequently is not harmful, but it is not a reliable method of birth control.
- If you think you are going to have sex, use a more reliable method of birth control.

What if I take ECP and don't know that I'm pregnant?

- We don't know what effect ECP has on a pregnancy.
- We do know that babies exposed to hormones similar to ECP before they were born were not harmed by these hormones.

What should I do after I finish taking ECP?

- If you have sex again, use reliable birth control.
- If you have birth control pills, you can start a new pack right away after taking ECP. You do not have to wait for your period to start.
- Make sure you see your health care provider for a pregnancy test if you don't get a period within 3 weeks after taking ECP.
- You can go to a community health clinic or talk to a public health nurse about birth control, STI tests, a Pap test, pregnancy test, or other health issues.

What if I get pregnant despite taking ECP?

- If you are pregnant, talk to a pregnancy counsellor at a community health clinic or public health nurse right away.
- Consider your options and make the choice that is right for you.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse
- From the Facts of Life On-Line: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.