

Fact Sheet

Emergency Contraception

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What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency Contraception is used to stop you falling pregnant if you have had unprotected sex. These types of contraception are useful when you have had sex without using any contraception, like when you have forgotten to take your usual contraceptive pill for a few days, or if a condom broke during sex. Emergency contraceptive pills are sometimes called 'the morning after pill' although they do not have to be taken the morning after unprotected sex to stop pregnancy but can be taken at any time of the day.

Although these tablets will still work several days after the time of unprotected sex, the sooner they are taken, the more likely it is that they will prevent a pregnancy. They work best if taken within the first 24 hours after unprotected sex.

Some emergency contraceptive pills are available without a doctor's prescription from pharmacies or your nearest sexual health clinic.

What types of Emergency Contraception are there?

There are three emergency contraceptive options available:

- The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) containing the hormone called levonorgestrol (ECP –LNG) these have names like Postinor-1® or Levonelle-1®. (There are several other brands too.)
- The Emergency Contraceptive Pill containing Ulipristal (ECP-U). It is also called ElleOne®
- The copper containing Intra Uterine Contraceptive Device (IUCD)

Emergency contraceptive pills work by stopping you releasing an egg (called ovulation) or by stopping the sperm from reaching an egg. They do not cause an abortion, but simply stop you from falling pregnant. If you are already pregnant, the morning after pill will not work and it will not cause any harm to your baby.

Although emergency contraception is very effective (works very well), it cannot prevent 100% of pregnancies.

Emergency Contraceptive Pill with Levonorgestrol (ECP-LNG)

This emergency contraception consists of two tablets. The first pill can be taken up to 96 hours (4 days) after unprotected sex, although it works better if taken within 72 hours (3 days). The second pill has to be taken exactly 12 hours after the first one.

Some medications (like some epilepsy treatments) may make this contraception less effective (not work as well). Also, if you vomit within 2 hours of taking the tablet, it will not work. If you do vomit, you will need to take another tablet.

It is very uncommon for women to have side effects from these pills; occasionally you may feel nauseous (sick in the tummy) or bloated for a short while after taking this form of emergency contraceptive.

This type of emergency contraception prevents about 85% of pregnancies.

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Emergency Contraceptive Pill with Ulipristal

This is a single (one) tablet which can be taken up to 120 hours (5 days) after unprotected sex.

It is very uncommon for women to have side effects from Ulipristal; occasionally you may feel mildly nauseous and have a headache or tummy ache for a short while. The first period after taking Ulipristal can be a bit more painful than usual.

If you vomit within 3 hours of taking this pill, you will need to take another dose.

This type of contraceptive is slightly more effective (prevents more pregnancies) than the ECP-LNG.

Ulipristal is not convenient for women who are breastfeeding, as they will need to express and throw away their breast milk for a week after taking the tablet. Breastfeeding women who need emergency contraception should preferably use the tablets containing levonorgestrol.

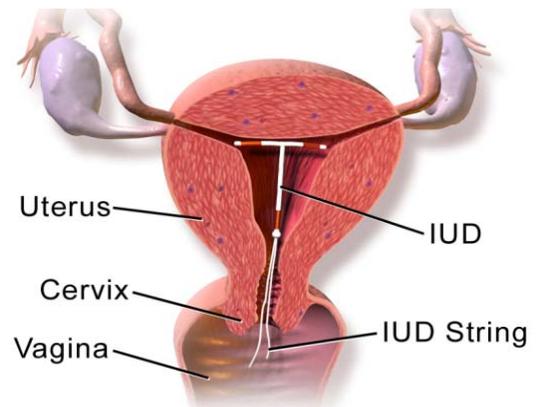


Single dose Emergency Contraceptive Pill

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What about an IUCD (Intra-Uterine Contraceptive Device)?

Having an IUCD put into the uterus is a very effective form of emergency contraception. The IUCD has a small copper wire wound around it – it is called the Copper IUCD. An IUCD can be inserted into the uterus up to 72 hours (5 days) after unprotected sex. It is 99% effective in preventing a pregnancy.



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An IUCD can only be inserted by a doctor trained to put them in - some GPs, and all gynaecologists and family planning clinics will be able to do this for you.

This type of emergency contraception is a good idea for women who want long term contraception and who have already had a baby. The IUCD can be left in the uterus for 5 or 10 years depending on the type of IUCD.

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IUCDs are not as suitable for young women who have not had children as they can be more difficult to put in. They are also not advised if you have many sexual partners as this increases your risk of STIs. It is important not to catch a sexually transmitted infection (STI) like chlamydia if you have an IUCD as it spreads the infection quickly into the womb and tubes.

How can I get emergency contraception?

You can get the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP-LNG) from your doctor, most pharmacies, or your nearest family planning clinic. You do NOT need a doctor's prescription to get emergency contraception. Occasionally a pharmacy does not stock these pills - if this happens do not worry, simply go to another pharmacy.

At the moment you still need a prescription to get the Ulipristil ECP, so you need to visit a doctor or your nearest family planning clinic if you want use this option.

What will the pharmacist ask me?

Questions your pharmacist will ask are important for him/her to know for your health and safety. Remember that pharmacists always check the medicines they are selling are safe for the patient.

- *How long ago the unprotected sex was?*
So they can be sure the ECP will still work for you.
- *Whether you have any other health problems?*
So they know it is safe for you to take the ECP.

- *Whether you take any medications?*
This includes medicines your doctor has given you and any medicines you have bought at a pharmacy or supermarket. So they can be sure the medicines won't stop the ECP working.
- *What you usually use as a contraceptive?*
- *When you last had a period and if you have had any irregular or unusual bleeding?*
To be sure you are not already pregnant.
- *They may ask if you have any symptoms like pain when passing urine, temperatures, vaginal discharge, pain in the lower tummy, or pain when you have sex.*
This makes sure you do not need to see a doctor to check whether you have an infection or other problems.

If the pharmacist does not want to sell you the ECP then he/she needs to tell you why and send you to a doctor if necessary. If the pharmacist will not give you a reason why they do not wish to sell you the medicine then she/he should refer you to someone who will sell it to you.

Questions the pharmacist should not be asking you:

- The pharmacist should not ask you who you are having sex with or whether your parents know you are having sex.
- Your age should not prevent the pharmacist from giving you the ECP.
- They should not ask about your religion.

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However, if you are being forced to have sex, it is important to discuss this with someone. Please talk with your doctor, or family planning clinic, or an adult person who you can trust so that they can help you.

Remember that all health professionals (doctors, pharmacists and nurses) are required by law to keep any information which you give them private and not tell anyone unless you give permission for them to do so.

What will my next period be like after taking the ECP?

Your next period should be quite normal. Occasionally, the ECP can cause irregular period bleeding. However, it is important to remember that no ECP is 100% effective, so if your period is 7 days late, you should do a pregnancy test and see your doctor.

You should also see your doctor if:

- Your period is shorter or lighter than usual.
- You are experiencing spotting or irregular bleeding.
- You have lower abdominal (stomach) pain. This can be a sign of an ectopic pregnancy, which is a pregnancy growing in the tube instead of inside the uterus. This can be dangerous for you and requires urgent medical attention.
- You have a fever or vaginal discharge or are worried you may have a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

When can I take my usual contraception again?

- If you have taken the ECP-LNG then you can continue your usual contraceptive pill.
- If you have taken Ulipristal, then you should not take your usual contraceptive pill (this includes the combined OCP, mini-pill and the vaginal ring) for 5 days and it is advised that you use condoms when you have sex until you get your period.

What if I don't usually use contraception?

It is possible to use emergency contraception more than once even in one cycle and it will not affect your health or your chances of having a baby in the future. However if you are having sex, you need to use regular contraception. We recommend that you visit your GP or local family planning clinic and discuss your contraceptive options with them.

Even if you take the pill for contraception, it is still best to use a condom every time you have sex. Condoms are the only contraceptive that will protect you from catching sexually transmitted infections like HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhoea & herpes.

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:

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