

Sexual Health

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION



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Emergency Contraception Pills (ECP), also known as “the morning after pill (MAP)” helps to prevent pregnancy by preventing or delaying the release of an egg using hormones. This emergency contraception can be used up to five days after unprotected sexual intercourse but is most effective if used immediately after unprotected sexual intercourse.

An IUD/IUS can also be used for emergency contraception and left in place to provide long-term contraception. It can be inserted up to seven days after unprotected intercourse.

How does it work?

Emergency contraception pills (ECP)

- Delay or prevent the release of an egg (ovulation)
- May prevent the implantation
- Does not induce an abortion
- Plan B® (progestin-only)
- Norlevo® (progestin-only)
- The Yuzpe method (combined estrogen and progestin)

Considerations - ECP

- Most effective if taken as soon as possible following unprotected intercourse.
- Is NOT intended as a method of birth control and should not be relied upon as a regular method of preventing pregnancy.
- If already pregnant, ECP will not affect the pregnancy.
- If you have a drug plan that covers ECP, you may be able to get a prescription from a physician or qualified health care provider at a walk-in clinic, hospital emergency department, doctor's office or family planning clinic.
- ECP is available without a prescription.
- ECP is available from some pharmacies (you may have to ask the pharmacist for it), a hospital's urgent care or emergency departments, health units.
- If there has been an abusive sexual act, you need to go to a hospital emergency room for assistance.
- Norlevo and Plan B cause fewer side effects than the combined method and are more effective.
- With the Yuzpe approach a pill to reduce nausea may be taken 30 minutes prior to each dose of ECP.

Commonly Reported Side Effects

- Nausea and vomiting can occur with the Yuzpe method and an anti-nausea medication is often recommended along with these hormone pills.
- Abdominal pain, diarrhea.
- Vaginal spotting, bleeding between periods.
- Breast tenderness.
- Headache, dizziness, fatigue.
- All side effects are gone usually within 24 hours.
- Some women might have more serious side effects. Seek the advice of health care provider before taking the Emergency Contraceptive Pill.

What Happens Next?

- The next period could begin anywhere from one week before to one week after the expected time of the next period.
- If a period has not started more than one week after the next regularly scheduled period, a pregnancy test should be done.
- Review your current birth control method and determine if a more effective method would be more appropriate.
- You should consider STI and HIV testing.

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Protection

No emergency contraceptive protects against STIs. Use a separate condom, dental dam, latex glove, for each sex act.

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.