

Contraception - Emergency Contraceptive Pills

Definition

- Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECPs) can prevent pregnancy after having sex.

Health Information

ECP Types

- ECPs can prevent pregnancy if taken within 5 days (120 hours) of having sex. The sooner you take them, the better they work.
- ECPs can cut the chance of pregnancy by 90%.
- ECPs are sometimes called "morning after pills." But you can take them any time of day, not just the morning after you had sex.
- ECPs are sold over the counter (OTC). You do not need a prescription.

Reasons to Use ECPs

- You can get pregnant from having unprotected sex. Unprotected sex means having sex without using any birth control.
- Birth control includes condoms, birth control pills and birth control patches. Other types are implants (like Nexplanon), birth control shots (like Depo Provera) and IUDs (like Mirena).
- Pregnancy can also happen in other situations. Here are some examples.
- Condom broke or came off.
- Birth control patch was off more than 48 hours.
- You missed more than 2 birth control pills.
- You took your progesterone-only pill more than 3 hours late.
- You take medicines that may interfere with your birth control pill. Examples are antibiotics and seizure medicines.
- Delay in getting birth control shot.

Symptoms from ECPs

- **Nausea and vomiting.** The most common side effect. Most often stops in 24 hours.
- **Change in menstrual periods.** 15% to 50% of women will have irregular periods or breakthrough bleeding after taking ECPs.

Care Advice

1. Key Points

- ECPs can prevent pregnancy after sex.
- The sooner you use them, the better.
- You can get them without a prescription.
- Here is some home care advice that should help.

2. **How to Get ECPs**

- Get an ECP as soon as possible. It must be taken within 5 days (120 hours) of sex. For the best protection, take an ECP within 3 days (72 hours).
- Common brands of ECPs are Plan B One Step, Next Choice One Dose and My Way.
- You can get ECPs at most drug stores without a prescription. If you can't find ECPs on the shelf, ask the pharmacist for help.
- You can get ECPs even if you are under 18. There are no age limits.
- ECPs cost \$15 to \$50. Sometimes your health insurance will cover ECPs.
- Once you have the ECP, follow the package directions for taking it.

3. **Preventing Vomiting from ECPs**

- To prevent nausea and vomiting, try an over-the-counter medicine for motion sickness. One option is meclizine (one brand name is Dramamine). Caution: it can make you a little drowsy.
- Take a dose of meclizine 1 hour before taking your ECP. Follow package directions for dosing.
- If you vomit within 3 hours of taking your ECP, you should take a second dose.

4. **Period Changes from ECPs**

- Breakthrough bleeding or spotting can occur in the week after taking an ECP.
- Spotting can start as soon as 8 hours after taking the ECP. Most often it occurs 4 days after the dose.
- After taking an ECP, you may have changes in your period. Your period can be shorter or longer. Most often, this stops after a few cycles.

5. **Consider Getting an Intrauterine Device (IUD)**

- An IUD put in the uterus within 5 days of sex can also prevent pregnancy.
- This is something you need to see a doctor to get.
- An IUD can cut the chance of pregnancy by 99%.
- An IUD will continue to prevent pregnancy for 5 to 10 years.

6. **Check for Pregnancy**

- If you don't have a period by 4 weeks after taking an ECP, take a pregnancy test.
- If the test is positive, call your doctor.

7. **Get Tested for STIs**

- ECPs and IUDs do NOT prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Condoms are the only way to prevent STIs during sex.
- Some STIs have symptoms like vaginal discharge or sores. Many STIs have no symptoms.
- If you are worried about an STI, avoid sex. Or be sure your partner uses a condom. Do this until you and your partner have been tested and treated.

8. **Pick a Regular Birth Control Method**

- ECPs are just for emergencies.
- ECPs don't work as well as regular birth control.
- You need a better plan. Pick a type of birth control (e.g., condom, pills, IUD). Use it regularly.
- Talk to your doctor for advice on choosing birth control. You can also visit a local public health clinic or Planned Parenthood office.

9. **Emergency Contraception Resources**

- Emergency Contraception Hotline. <http://ec.princeton.edu/providers/index.html>. 800-584-9911.
- Planned Parenthood. www.plannedparenthood.org. 1-800-230-7526.
- Canadian Sexual Health. www.sexualheathandrights.ca. 613-241-4474.

10. What to Expect

- You can still get pregnant even after taking an ECP. If you don't get your period in 4 weeks, you should take a pregnancy test.
- If you are already pregnant, ECPs will not cause an abortion.
- ECPs do not cause any birth defects.

Call Your Doctor If

- Pregnancy test is positive
- You are concerned about STIs
- You think you need to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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