

Advice for Adolescents and Caregivers

Emergency contraception

You can become pregnant if you have unprotected intercourse even just once! Maybe you tried to protect yourself but the condom broke. Perhaps you were taking birth control pills but missed two or more of them, or you usually get a birth control shot every three months but missed your last shot. Or you thought that if your boyfriend didn't ejaculate inside you, you couldn't get pregnant. Possibly in the heat of the moment, you just didn't think about birth control. Maybe you were sexually assaulted.

If you have had sex in the past few days, it isn't too late to prevent a pregnancy using emergency contraception. Although sometimes called the morning after pill, emergency contraception can be used up to three days after intercourse (even up to five days after).

What are emergency contraceptive pills?

Emergency contraceptive pills (ECP) are high dose birth control pills. They aren't 100% effective, but they do reduce greatly the chance of getting pregnant

What if I am already pregnant?

Emergency contraception will not make your pregnancy go away. It is not an abortion pill. However, if you find out after you have taken it that you are pregnant, don't worry. Many women have taken estrogen and progesterone (the hormones in ECPs) in early pregnancy without harm to the fetus.

What are the side effects of emergency contraception?

The most common side effects of ECPs are nausea and vomiting. A pill to lessen the symptoms is given with the ECPs, called gravol. If you throw up within an hour of taking the first dose of ECPs, you need to repeat it. Some women will have sore breasts for a few days, and others have complained about headaches. These problems are much less common.

How do I take it?

You will be given three pills (two are emergency contraception, one is antinausea, gravol) to take immediately, and three pills to take 12 hrs later. If you will be unable to take them in 12 hrs, you can delay your first dose so that you can take the second dose 12 hrs later. For instance, if it is 10 o'clock at night, and at 10 tomorrow morning you will be in class, you can wait until midnight to take the first pills and take the next ones at lunchtime. The second dose of pills is very important.

- Do not drive or drink any alcohol for the next 24 hrs after the second set of pills. The medication that you take to prevent nausea may make you feel drowsy.

- Do not take any extra birth control pills. They will not decrease your chance of getting pregnant and will likely increase nausea and vomiting.

When will I get my period?

Some women get their period a few days after taking emergency contraception. Others have it when they are expecting their next period or even a bit later. If you haven't started a period within three weeks of taking the ECPs, you should have a pregnancy test.

How long will emergency contraception protect me?

Do not count on emergency contraception to protect you if you have unprotected intercourse again. You should use condoms and spermicide if you are going to have intercourse. Talk to your doctor about starting a reliable form of birth control.

Why not just use emergency contraception each time I have sex?

Emergency contraception is not as good at preventing pregnancy as other methods of birth control such as birth control pills taken regularly or birth control shots. In addition, you should be using condoms to prevent sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS.

Where can I find more information?

Your paediatrician, family doctor or local public health department will have more information about this. On the Internet, you can try:
www.opr.princeton.edu/ec/

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.