



How to Use Emergency Contraceptive Pills

Have you had unprotected sex?

Unprotected sex is:

- Sexual intercourse without birth control
- Sexual intercourse where your birth control didn't work properly

If you have had unprotected sex within the past **five** days, emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) can help protect you from getting pregnant.

The earlier you take the ECPs the better. They are most effective if you take them within the first 24 hours after unprotected sex.

What is an Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)?

The ECPs available from your pharmacist are pills that contain 0.75 mg of levonorgestrel. You buy the pills in packages of two. These packages are called 'Plan B'.

How does an ECP work?

It depends on where you are in your menstrual cycle. There are four ways ECPs prevent pregnancy:

1. ECPs can stop you from ovulating for a few days.
2. ECPs can slow the movements of the egg or the sperm in the tubes between your ovaries and your uterus.
3. ECPs may prevent a sperm from fertilizing an egg.
4. ECPs can change the lining of your uterus, which may prevent a fertilized egg from attaching properly.

ECPs are a last chance method to prevent pregnancy. ECPs do not cause abortions. ECPs won't work if you are already pregnant. If you think you may be pregnant, you should take a pregnancy test or see a doctor or family planning clinic.

ECPs reduce the chance of becoming pregnant. On average, if 100 women had unprotected intercourse during the second or third week of their menstrual cycle, 8 would become pregnant. ECPs can reduce that number to 1 in 100.

How do I take 'Plan B' ECPs?

- Swallow one pill as soon as possible, then swallow the next pill 12 hours later.

OR

- Swallow both pills as a single dose as soon as possible.

Do not swallow any extra ECPs. Extra pills will make you have more side effects.

What are the side effects of ECPs?

Only some women experience side effects from ECPs. Side effects of ECPs are:

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| Nausea (sick to your stomach) | Fatigue (feeling tired) |
| Vomiting | Headache |
| Cramps | Breast Tenderness |

Your next period may start a few days earlier or later than usual. If you don't start your period within three weeks after taking ECPs, see your doctor or local clinic for an exam and pregnancy test.

You can take an anti-nausea medication ½ hour before you take a dose of emergency contraception. It will help to reduce nausea and vomiting.

If you vomit within one hour of taking the first ECP, you might not have absorbed the medication in that pill. Take an anti-nausea medication right away, wait ½ hour for it to work, and then take the second pill in the ECP package. Then go buy another ECP package so that you can take another pill as scheduled, 12 hours later. Take an anti-nausea medication ½ hour before taking this pill too.

If you experience headaches, breast tenderness or cramps you can use a pain reliever. Ask your pharmacist for advice about any of these types of medication.

Can I use ECPs instead of other birth control methods?

No, you should NOT use ECPs instead of birth control. ECPs are not as effective as other methods of birth control. **ECPs are only for emergencies.** You should always use at least one of the following methods of birth control:

- birth control pills
- contraceptive injections
- contraceptive patches
- diaphragms with contraceptive jelly
- condoms with contraceptive jelly

ECPs don't prevent pregnancy if you have unprotected sex after you take the ECPs. If you already take birth control pills, you should start a new pack the day after using ECPs. Use barrier methods of contraception, such as condoms, until you have taken birth control pills for seven days in a row. It is always a good idea to use condoms because they help protect you from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

To learn more about birth control, you can ask your pharmacist, nurse practitioner or doctor. You can also visit a local family planning clinic. The website www.sexualityandu.ca has lots of information on birth control and sexual health.