

What you should know about

Emergency Contraception (EC)



A second chance at birth control

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If you have intercourse without birth control, or if your method of birth control fails, you have a 2-30% chance of becoming pregnant. The sooner that EC is taken, the better it works to prevent pregnancy. **EC should NOT be used as a regular method of birth control.** Rather, it is a “second chance” when birth control hasn’t been used or fails.

What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency contraception pills are hormonal pills (similar to birth control pills) that you can take to help prevent a pregnancy after you have had unprotected vaginal intercourse (birth control method fails or no birth control method was used).

How does it work? How effective is it?

The hormones estrogen and progestin act in one of two ways. Either they keep the ovary from releasing an egg so it cannot join with a sperm or they change the lining of the uterus in such a way that if an egg is fertilized it will not implant and develop into a pregnancy.

Emergency hormonal contraception can reduce the risk of pregnancy by up to 75-89% when taken within the first 72 hours of intercourse. Studies have shown that even if EC is taken as late as 120 hours (5 days) after unprotected intercourse it may prevent pregnancy. It appears to be less effective the later it is used. The effectiveness of using EC beyond 120 hours has not been proven.

What are the risks and side effects?

Rare but serious problems and complications, particularly with blood clots, can occur with the regular use of birth control pills. However, it has **not** been proven that blood clotting (and other complications) are connected with the use of EC.

Some possible reactions (for about 24 hours) may include:

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Breast tenderness
- Irregular bleeding
- Headaches or dizziness

How do I know if they worked?

Your next period could be early or late, or could be lighter or heavier. You should expect your period between the next 2-3 weeks after taking the pills. If you do not have a normal period in 4 weeks, return to the health center.

How often can Emergency Contraception be used?

Emergency Contraception is **NOT** meant to be used as a regular method of birth control. Get started immediately with a reliable form of contraception.

Planned Parenthood health centers provide information and supplies for all the FDA approved methods of birth control.

To more information or to find a health center near you, call **1-800-230-PLAN** or visit **www.ppin.org**.

