

All About Emergency Contraception (EC)

What is contraception?

Contraception is birth control: preventing pregnancy before it starts.

What is EC?

It's a dose of birth control you can use in case of unprotected intercourse (no birth control, broken condom, sexual assault, etc). There are two basic kinds: Plan B (progesterone-only) and regular birth control pills (progesterone + estrogen - see below for dosages). (Inserting an IUD is another form of EC, but is discussed in another handout to avoid confusion).

How can I get it?

If you are over 18 - You can buy Plan B at a drugstore - just ask the pharmacist for it. Prices are usually \$10-40, depending where you go. If you have access to birth control pills (you can ask your doctor for a prescription), you can take them for EC (see below for dosages).

If you are under 18 - Ask your personal doctor for a Plan B prescription (only fill it if you need it). With a prescription, you can buy EC (called Plan B) at a drugstore. Prices are usually \$10-40, depending where you go.

If you don't want to ask your doctor, call 1-888-NOT-2-LATE for information on how to get a prescription.

Some states let women under 18 get EC at the drugstore without a prescription: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Washington State, and Vermont.

Note - According to FDA rules, anyone over 18, male or female, can buy Plan B. Stores are not allowed to keep records of who buys EC.

In most states, pharmacists can refuse to sell EC if their religion is against birth control. In this case, you can just go to a different drug store.

How does it work?

We know that it stops you from having an egg. We don't have direct evidence that EC makes it any harder for sperm to affect the egg, or that it stops a fertilized egg from staying in the uterus. We know that it does not affect a fertilized egg that is already implanted in the uterus.

Is it abortion?

No. According to the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics, "EC is not an abortifacient because it has its effect prior to the earliest time of implantation." You can't use EC for abortion, because it does not harm pregnancy.

How well does it work?

It reduces the risk of getting by 75% or more. This means, if 100 fertile women had unprotected sex once, 8 of them would get pregnant, without EC. But with EC, only 2 would get pregnant.

Is it safe?

Yes. Even women who can't take birth control pills can use Plan B. If you can safely take regular birth control pills, you can use them for EC (see below).

Are there side effects?

Some women get nausea that lasts a day or so. If you take extra doses by mistake, you are more likely to get nauseous - but it will still go away in a day or two. If this bothers you, you can take over-the-counter anti-nausea medicine (Dramamine, Emetrol), or drink ginger tea.

The next period may be a little early or late, but there are no permanent effects. If a woman finds out she was already pregnant, EC will not harm her or her baby.

Why not just use EC instead of regular birth control?

EC isn't as effective as regular birth control. EC prevents pregnancy 75% of the time, while regular birth control usually prevents pregnancy 90-99% of the time.

Is it new?

No. It is more than 40 years old:

1967 - First study of EC was published in a medical journal.

1971 - Two large studies were published in medical journals, about college clinics (Yale, University of Michigan) offering EC, leading to more widespread use.

1978 - The FDA sent a letter to doctors and pharmacists saying that it might approve EC for cases of rape or incest.

1984 - EC was available in Europe.

1996 - The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists stated that EC is medically safe.

1997 - The FDA approved EC for off-label use.

1999 - The FDA approved prescription sales of Plan B.

2001 - The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published its *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* stating that "A female who has been raped should be able to defend herself against a potential conception from the sexual assault. If, after appropriate testing, there is no evidence that conception has occurred already, she may be treated with medications that would prevent ovulation, sperm capacitation, or fertilization." This allows Catholic health services to give EC to women with negative ovulation tests, if they have been assaulted.

2003 - The American Academy of Family Physicians announced they support EC being available over-the-counter.

2005 - The American Academy of Pediatrics announced they support EC being available to teenagers.

2006 - The FDA approved Plan B over-the-counter for women 18 years and older. It stayed prescription-only for younger women.

How soon should you take EC?

Most studies are done using EC within 3 days (72 hours) after sex. Newer studies show it works within 5 days (120 hours). If you have trouble getting EC, call 1-888-NOT-2-LATE to reduce your delay.

How do I use EC?

Plan B comes as two pills. You can take them 12 hours apart, or you can take them both at the same time.

Using regular birth-control pills, take one dose, followed by the second dose 12 hours later. See below for correct first and second doses of regular birth-control pills:

Allesse 5 + 5 pink pills

Aviane 5 + 5 orange pills

Cryselles 4 + 4 white pills

Enpresse 4 + 4 orange pills

Jolissa 4 + 4 pink pills

Lessina 5 + 5 pink pills

Levlen 4 + 4 light-orange pills

Levlite 5 + 5 pink pills

Levora 4 + 4 white pills

Lo/Ovral 4 + 4 white pills

Low-Ogestrel 4 + 4 white pills

Lutera 5 + 5 white pills

Lybrel 6 + 6 yellow pills

Nordette 4 + 4 light-orange pills

Ogestrel 2 + 2 white pills

Ovral 2 + 2 white pills

Portia 4 + 4 pink pills

Quasense 4 + 4 white pills

Seasonale 4 + 4 pink pills

Seasonique 4 + 4 light-blue-green pills

Tri-Levlen 4 + 4 yellow pills

Triphasil 4 + 4 yellow pills

Trivora 4 + 4 pink pills

Do not take extra doses - they won't work any better, and they could make you nauseated.

I took EC. Now what?

Use condoms and foam or jelly for any more sex before your next period. Buy a supply and keep them on hand.

You can start a new form of birth control when you get your next period - call your doctor or Planned Parenthood right away for an appointment.

Your next period might be early or late by a few days. If it is more than 7 days late, get a pregnancy test.

How can I help make EC more available?

Spread the word! Tell your family and friends the truth about EC. Send them to the website not-2-late.com (make sure you include the dashes). If you are a teenager, show them your prescription. Call the number on your insurance card and ask them if they pay for Plan B. Call your drugstore and ask how much it costs. One well-informed woman is a resource for her whole community!