

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception, sometimes referred to as the “morning after” pill, is a method of birth control used to decrease the incidence of unwanted pregnancy.

Emergency contraception works best if given within 72 hours or 3 days of intercourse. Although it is a method of birth control, it should be noted that traditional hormonal birth control use on a consistent basis (pill, patch, ring) is more effective.

You may consider emergency contraception if you have had intercourse and

- Forgot to use protection or your regular birth control
- Had a condom break
- Had your diaphragm move out of place
- You were forced to have intercourse or were raped
- You miscalculated the safe time in your cycle to have sex

Emergency contraception works by delaying ovulation and thickening cervical mucous which makes it difficult for sperm to fertilize an egg. Emergency contraception does not cause an abortion and there is no evidence that emergency contraception will adversely affect a pregnancy already implanted in the uterus.

Emergency contraception can be taken as a regimen of birth control pills specifically advised by your doctor or can be taken as Plan B®. Plan B® contains the hormone progesterone. It appears to be the most effective method of emergency contraception with the fewest side effects. Plan B® reduces the risk of pregnancy by 89% when taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse.

Emergency contraception is very safe and most side effects are minor. They may include nausea, headache, breast tenderness, or dizziness. Irregular periods may occur as well, especially if emergency contraception is used repeatedly.

Plan B® is available over the counter (without a prescription) to men and women age 18 and older. You will need to ask for it at the pharmacy counter. If you are younger than 18, you will need a prescription from a health care provider.

Remember, emergency contraception is safe and effective, but should not replace routine contraception which is more effective. Also, it is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible after unprotected intercourse. If you have not had your regular period within three weeks of taking emergency contraception, you should take a pregnancy test and contact your health care provider.