

Using Emergency Contraception

What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency contraception is a way of preventing pregnancy after unprotected sex. It is a hormonal pill or combination of pills that can prevent a pregnancy if taken **within 5 days** of unprotected sex. **The sooner you take it, the more effective it is at preventing pregnancy.** Emergency contraception works by stopping or delaying the release of an egg so it cannot be fertilized. It **does not** work once a fertilized egg is attached to the uterus and **will not** cause an abortion. It **will not** harm a pregnancy if you are already pregnant.

When Should You Use Emergency Contraception?

If you have sex without any form of birth control, the birth control method was unreliable or was not used correctly:

- If the condom broke
- If you missed 2 or more of your birth control pills
- If your birth control patch was off for more than 24 hours during a patch-on week
- If your birth control vaginal ring was out for more than 3 hours during a ring-in week
- If you missed a birth control shot (Depo-Provera)

What Types of Emergency Contraception Are Available?

- **Plan B** is the most common emergency contraception. It is a pill that contains a hormone called progestin. It should be taken within 72 hours (3 days) of unprotected sex. Plan B is available from drugstores without a prescription for women and men 17 and older. You will need to ask the pharmacist for Plan B. If you are under 17, you will need a prescription from a medical provider. www.planbonestep.com
- **A specific number of birth control pills can be used if you are already taking them.** These pills contain the hormones estrogen and progestin. The number of pills you need to take varies depending on the birth control pill. You should contact your medical provider for the correct number of pills to take and when to take them.

What Are the Common Side Effects?

Nausea and vomiting for 24 hours are the most common side effects. This is much greater if using birth control pills for emergency contraception. Your medical provider can prescribe medication to take before taking the pills to minimize the nausea. Taking the pills on a full stomach may also reduce the nausea.

How Effective is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency contraception is not as effective as ongoing and correct use of the birth control pill, ring, patch, or shot. Plan B reduces the risk of pregnancy by 89% when started within 72 hours of unprotected sex. Birth control pills reduce the risk of pregnancy by 75% when started within 72 hours. The sooner you take it, the more effective it will be at preventing pregnancy.

Emergency contraception should not be used as your main form of birth control.