



OFFICE OF POPULATION AFFAIRS

# Emergency Contraception

THE FACTS



# Emergency Contraception THE FACTS



## Quick Facts

### What is it?

Emergency contraception is birth control that you use after you have had unprotected sex--if you didn't use birth control or your regular birth control failed. Depending on the type of emergency contraception, you can use emergency contraception within 3 days or within 5 days after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.

There are two types of emergency contraception (EC):

- Emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs)
  - a. *Plan B One-Step*, *Next Choice One Dose*, and *My Way* consist of one pill that the instructions state must be taken within 3 days (72 hours).
  - b. *Levonorgestrel Tablets* consist of two pills. Although the instructions state that the first one must be taken within 3 days (72 hours) and another must be taken 12 hours later, both pills can be taken at the same time within four days (96 hours) after unprotected sex.
  - c. *ella* consists of one pill that must be taken within 5 days (120 hours).

Research has shown that the pills in a and b above are equally effective when taken on the first-fourth days after unprotected sex and are ineffective thereafter. *ella* is equally effective when on the first-fifth days.

- Emergency insertion of a copper T intrauterine device (IUD) within 5 days (120 hours)<sup>1</sup>.

### How do I get emergency contraceptive pills?

ECPs are available at some pharmacies. Women (and men) of all ages can get emergency contraceptive pills besides *ella* without a prescription. You may want to check that your local pharmacy carries ECPs before making a trip there.

Women of all ages need a prescription for *ella*. Contact your health care provider to get a prescription.

Many family planning clinics dispense emergency contraceptive pills and offer IUDs as a birth control option. Check the clinic locator on OPA's [home page](#) for a clinic near you.



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- Emergency insertion of a copper T intrauterine device (IUD) within 5 days (120 hours)<sup>1</sup>.

## How do the different emergency contraceptive pills work?

- *Plan B One-Step*, *Next Choice One Dose*, *My Way* and *Levonorgestrel Tablets* are pills containing the hormone progestin (levonorgestrel). Progestins are hormones found in some commonly-used birth control pills.

These pills work mainly by stopping the release of an egg from the ovary.

- *ella* is another type of emergency contraceptive pill; its active ingredient is ulipristal acetate.

*ella* works mainly by stopping or delaying the ovaries from releasing an egg. *ella* is the most effective of the pills.

<sup>1</sup> Cleland K, Zhu H, Goldstuck N, Cheng L, Trussell J. The efficacy of intrauterine devices for emergency contraception: a systematic review of 35 years of experience. *Hum Reprod.* 2012 Jul;**27**(7):1994-2000.



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## How do I get emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs)?

ECPs are available at some pharmacies. Women (and men) of all ages can get emergency contraceptive pills besides ella without a prescription. *Next Choice One Dose, My Way* and *Levonorgestrel Tablets* are available without a prescription to women (and men) aged 17 or over. Females 16 and under need a prescription. You may want to check that your local pharmacy carries ECPs before making a trip there.

Women of all ages need a prescription for *ella*. Contact your health care provider to get a prescription.

Many family planning clinics dispense emergency contraceptive pills and offer IUDs as a birth control option. Check the clinic locator on the OPA's [home page](#) for a clinic near you.

## How effective are ECPs?



*Plan B One-Step, Next Choice One Dose, My Way* and *Levonorgestrel Tablets*: 7 out of 8 women who would have gotten pregnant will not become pregnant after taking *these pills*.

*ella*: 6 or 7 out of every 100 women who would have gotten pregnant will not become pregnant after taking *ella*.

## What are the side effects of ECPs?

Some women taking ECPs experience:

- headache
- nausea
- abdominal pain
- menstrual pain
- tiredness
- dizziness



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## Advantages of ECPs

- Don't require consent from the male partner
- Safe and effective in preventing pregnancy after unprotected sex
- Some are available over-the-counter

## Drawbacks of ECPs

- Not as effective as some other types of birth control
- Require a clinic visit and a prescription in some cases
- Do not work if you are already pregnant
- May cause side effects like nausea (anti-nausea medication might help with this), vomiting, stomach pain and headaches
- Do not protect against sexually transmitted infections



## Can I use ECPs if I am pregnant?

Women who are pregnant or suspect they are pregnant should not use ECPs. This is because they are ineffective; ECPs will not cause any adverse effects on an existing pregnancy.

Emergency contraceptive pills prevent pregnancy and are different from medications which cause abortions.

## How does the copper T IUD work as emergency contraception?

The [copper T IUD](#) is a method of emergency contraception when it is inserted within five days of unprotected intercourse.

The copper T IUD is a T-shaped device that is put into the uterus by a health care provider. It prevents sperm from reaching the egg, from fertilizing the egg, and may prevent the egg from attaching in the uterus. It does not stop the ovaries from making an egg each month.

One advantage is that it can remain in place for up to ten years as a women's regular contraception. After the IUD is taken out, you can get pregnant.



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## How effective is it?

The copper T IUD is the most effective emergency contraceptive method. Out of one thousand (1000) women who use this method, only one will get pregnant.

## What are the side effects and possible risks?

Some women experience cramps and/or irregular bleeding.

Uncommon risks are pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

## Does any form of emergency contraception protect me from STIs?

No. A condom must be used for STI protection.

## Sources

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- The Emergency Contraception Website, accessed 3/12/14 at <http://ec.princeton.edu/>
- Robert A. Hatcher, et.al., Contraceptive Technology, 20<sup>th</sup> revised edition, Ardent Media, Inc., 2011 <http://ec.princeton.edu/>
- Cleland K, Zhu H, Goldstuck N, Cheng L, Trussell J. The efficacy of intrauterine devices for emergency contraception: a systematic review of 35 years of experience. *Hum Reprod.* 2012 Jul;**27**(7):1994-2000.

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