

Emergency Contraception Fact Sheet

Emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) are a back-up method of birth control. They should be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex to decrease the risk of pregnancy. They must be taken within 5 days of the unprotected sex. Unprotected sex means sex without a condom or other reliable method of birth control, or that a condom broke, slipped off, or may not have been used throughout the whole episode of sex.

There are 2 types of ECPs. Plan B One-Step®, Next Choice®, and similar pills have a hormone called progestin, which is similar to a hormone women make naturally. Ella® (ulipristal) affects how progestin hormones work in the body. Both types of ECPs reduce the risk of pregnancy by delaying or preventing ovulation (the release of an egg). Neither type of ECP works after an egg has been fertilized by sperm and will not impact a pregnancy that has already occurred (cause an abortion). Ella® (ulipristal) is more effective than Plan B One-Step® and similar pills. This is especially true for women who are overweight and/or who are close to the time in their cycle when they ovulate (release an egg).

The **copper intrauterine device (IUD)** can also be used as a back-up method of birth control. It must be inserted into the uterus (womb) within 5-7 days of unprotected sex. The copper IUD is much more effective at preventing pregnancy after unprotected sex than ECPs (less than 1 woman in 1,000 will become pregnant). The copper IUD works as a spermicide (kills sperm) and may also prevent a fertilized egg from implanting into the uterus. There may be serious health risks to inserting a copper IUD in a woman who is already pregnant, so it is important to make sure that a woman isn't already pregnant from a previous episode of sex before the copper IUD is inserted.

ECPs and the copper IUD do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms are the best way for sexually active people to reduce the risk of infection. Always use a condom if you or your partner has other sex partners or if you may otherwise be at risk for STIs. Call your provider's office if you think you may have been exposed to an STI.

Potential Side Effects of Using Emergency Contraception:

- Rarely, ECPs may cause breast tenderness, nausea, or mood changes which will resolve within a few days.
- ECPs may make a woman's next period come earlier or later than expected.
- ECPs may be less effective with certain epilepsy (anti-seizure), anti-retroviral, and some other medications.
- The copper IUD may cause irregular bleeding or spotting, which usually stops after several months of use. In some women it may also cause slightly heavier bleeding or cramping with periods.

Risks of Emergency Contraception:

- ECPs have no serious health risks.
- The copper IUD has rare risks of: expulsion (falling out), infection, and perforation (when the IUD is pushed into or through the wall of the uterus during insertion, which may require surgery to remove).

Contraindications:

- ECPs are safe for all women (even those who can't take regular birth control pills).
- The copper IUD is generally not recommended for women who: have had an infection in the uterus (PID or endometritis) in the past 3 months, currently have an untreated STI, have certain uterine abnormalities, or who may be pregnant from a previous episode of sex.

Tell your clinician if you have any of these risk factors or conditions.

Problem-solving:

- Take ECPs as soon as possible after any episodes of unprotected sex or after sex when you're unsure if you've been using your regular method of birth control correctly.
- After taking ECPs, you should call your clinician's office as soon as possible to talk about the possibility of having a copper IUD placed, your regular method of birth control, refilling your ECPs, and other care you may need.
- If you use emergency contraception, you should take a home pregnancy test about 5 weeks later. It's best to take the test the first time you urinate (pee, shi shi) in the morning. If you prefer, you can arrange to take a pregnancy test at your provider's office.