

Emergency Contraception

Also known as the morning after pill, although there are other forms of emergency contraception.

What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is used to reduce the risk of pregnancy if you have had sex without contraception or if:

- contraception has failed (missed pill, condom broke or came off), or
- the method was unreliable (e.g. the withdrawal method).

There are three types of emergency contraception available in Australia:

1. *Levonorgestrel* emergency contraceptive pill. (Brand names vary, a common one is *Postinor*).
2. *Ulipristal* acetate emergency contraceptive pill, which is sold as *EllaOne*.
3. A copper intrauterine device (IUD) inserted within five days of unprotected sexual intercourse by a trained doctor or nurse.

How does it work?

- The emergency contraception pills work by stopping or delaying the release of an egg (ovulation).
- Emergency contraception pills do not prevent implantation of a fertilised egg.
- Copper IUDs prevent fertilisation and implantation of an egg.

How well does it work?

- Emergency contraception is between 85-99.5% effective, depending on which type you use.
- Emergency contraception pills are most effective if taken in the first 24 hours after unprotected sex.
- The *Ulipristal* acetate pill is more effective than the *Levonorgestrel EC* pill.
- Copper IUDs can be more than 99% effective if used within five days of unprotected sex.

Copper IUD insertion requires at least two visits to specially trained health professionals and can be difficult to organise in the required five day time frame.

Where can I get emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception pills are available over the counter at pharmacies, emergency departments and Family Planning Tasmania. You do not need a prescription (script).

Prices vary between \$20 and \$45 for emergency contraception pills. Costs are lower if you have a Concession card and/or Medicare card.

If you are under 16, the pharmacist may ask you some questions to make sure you understand the effects of taking the emergency contraception pill.

You can obtain a copper IUD from Family Planning Tasmania clinics. You will need two appointments to have a Copper IUD fitted: one for the assessment and one to fit the IUD. Copper IUDs cost approximately \$100.

Is emergency contraception right for me?

Emergency contraception may not be the right choice if you are:

- taking certain types of medication, including other contraceptives
- breastfeeding, or
- overweight (you may need to take a double dose).

Possible side effects

- menstrual changes
- nausea
- headaches
- breast tenderness
- dizziness.

What could stop emergency contraception from working?

Emergency contraceptive pills may not work if you:

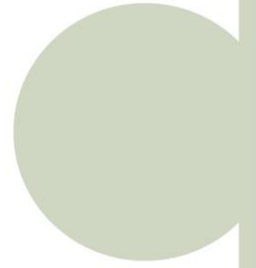
- miss the required timeframe (not more than five days)
- vomit within two to three hours of taking them
- are taking certain medications (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

What else do I need to know?

- Emergency contraception pills do not provide ongoing contraception after they are taken.
- If you have further unprotected sex, you should take the emergency contraception pill again. The previous dose will not be effective.
- You can take emergency contraception pills more than once per menstrual cycle. It is important to use the same type as switching to another type during a cycle can reduce the effectiveness.
- Some contraceptive pills can affect emergency contraception (check with your pharmacist or doctor).
- After taking emergency contraception pills, your period may be slightly earlier or later. You should take a pregnancy test if your period is more than a week late, unusual in any way or if you are displaying any pregnancy symptoms such as breast tenderness, nausea or urinary frequency.
- If the emergency contraception pill is accidentally taken during pregnancy, there is no evidence to suggest that it is harmful to the developing embryo or foetus. It does not cause a termination (abortion).
- If you use the *Ulipristal* acetate EC pill while breastfeeding, you will need to express and discard your breast milk for seven days.
- A copper IUD provides ongoing contraception and is 99.5% effective in preventing pregnancies.
- A copper IUD is safe to insert from six weeks after giving birth.
- Emergency contraception does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or blood borne viruses.

For more information, support & advice visit www.fpt.asn.au.

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