

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).

These 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.

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.

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.

How effective is emergency contraception?

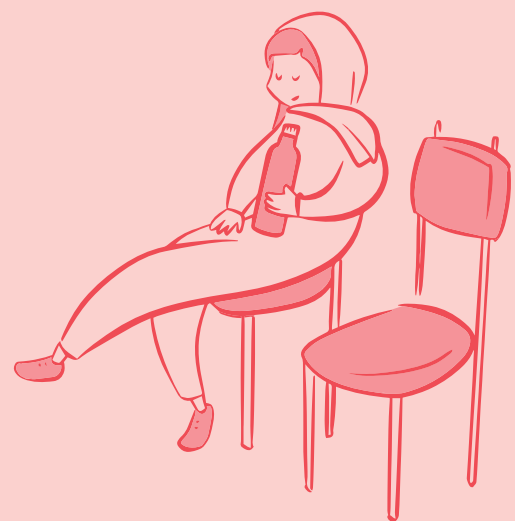
Emergency contraception is between **85-99.5% effective**, depending on which type you use and when you take it.

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.



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 does 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 of pregnancy (abortion).
- If you use the Ulipristal acetate EC pill while breastfeeding, you will need to express and discard your breast milk for 24 hours.
- Emergency contraception does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or blood borne viruses.

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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 or three hours of taking them
- are taking certain medications (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist)
- are significantly overweight.

Possible side effects

- Menstrual changes.
- Nausea.
- Headaches.
- Breast tenderness.
- Dizziness.

Is emergency contraception right for me?

Emergency contraception may not be appropriate if you are:

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

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For more information, support and advice visit www.fpt.org.au

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