

Emergency Contraception

Commonly called the "Morning After Pill"

What is emergency contraception?

- It is a special kind of hormone pill that can prevent pregnancy after you have unprotected sex or your birth control method fails (e.g. condom breaks).
- **Emergency contraception is only for emergency use** and does not provide ongoing protection against pregnancy between your periods.

How does emergency contraception work?

Depending on where you are in your menstrual cycle, emergency contraception may:

- stop or delay the release of the egg.
- change the lining of the uterus.
- change the movement of the egg and sperm, by slowing it down, so fertilization and implantation may not occur.

Emergency contraception does not affect a pregnancy that has already been implanted in the uterus.

How do I use emergency contraception?

- There are two hormonal types of emergency contraception. The effectiveness, cost and side effects of the two emergency contraception methods, Plan B and Ovral, are slightly different.

Plan B - Contains one hormone (progestin)
- Plan B is 2 pills.

You can take 2 Plan B pills right away OR take 1 pill right away and 1 pill in 12 hours. Taking the 2 pills at once is easier and just as effective.

Ovral - Contains two hormones (estrogen and progestin)
- Ovral is 4 pills.

Take 2 Ovral pills as soon as possible.
Take the next 2 Ovral pills 12 hours later.

How effective is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is most effective if taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex.

Emergency contraception can be effective up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex.

Plan B will prevent:

- First 24 hours - about 95 per cent of possible pregnancies
- 25 to 48 hours - about 85 per cent of possible pregnancies
- 49 to 120 hours - effectiveness begins to drop to 58 per cent at 72 hours

Ovral will prevent:

- First 24 hours - about 77 per cent of possible pregnancies
- 25 to 48 hours - about 36 per cent of possible pregnancies
- 49 to 120 hours - effectiveness begins to drop to 31 per cent at 72 hours

When should I take emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception should be considered any time a female wants to avoid pregnancy. This may include the following situations:

- A birth control method was not used.
- Condom(s) broke, leaked, slipped, or fell off.
- Withdrawal (pulling out) method was used.
- A birth control pill was not started or missed by 24 hours or longer.
- A progestin only pill (e.g. Micronor) was missed by more than 3 hours.
- A birth control patch fell off for more than 24 hours or was applied late by 2 or more days.
- A new vaginal contraceptive ring was inserted 2 or more days late, a ring fell out for more than 3 hours or was worn for more than 28 days.
- A Depo Provera injection is overdue by 7 or more days.
- A diaphragm was not used correctly.
- An IUD partially or totally fell out.
- Sexual assault occurred.

Where do I get emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception can be obtained by getting a prescription from your health-care provider or birth control clinic. Emergency contraception (Plan B) may be available at your local pharmacy without a prescription. You may be charged extra for a pharmacy consultation fee.

What are the side effects of emergency contraception?

- Women may have light bleeding in the next few days after taking the pills.
- Some women may experience headaches, stomach cramps, bloating, nausea or feel more tired than usual, but these side effects are not common.
- Nausea and vomiting are common side effects of Ovral.
- To prevent nausea and vomiting, take an anti-nausea pill (e.g. Gravol) 1 hour before taking the Ovral pills.
- Eating before taking Ovral may decrease nausea and vomiting as well.
- If you vomit within 1 hour of taking the Ovral pills, contact your birth control clinic or health-care provider. You may need another dose of Ovral pills, otherwise you may become pregnant.

See your doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency room if you have:

- Blood clots - In rare cases, women taking emergency contraception may develop a blood clot. Your risk is higher if you are a smoker. If there is a family history or you have had a blood clot, heart attack or stroke, you are at higher risk.
- Symptoms of blood clots
 - severe abdominal pain
 - severe chest pain or difficulty breathing
 - severe headaches or numbness in arms and legs
 - eye problems such as blurred vision or loss of vision
 - severe leg pain

Important to remember

- The dose of hormone(s) in emergency contraception is safe - there are no long-term effects.
- Emergency contraception does not bring on your period right away.
- Your period may come early or late, but it should come in the next 21 to 28 days. If you do not get your period you should have a pregnancy test.
- A pregnancy test can be done by your health-care provider or at a birth control clinic.

Sexual decision making

Choose to have sex or not - you have the right to make that decision.

Choose to protect yourself from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STI.

Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.

For more information

Contact your physician, local community health centre or birth control clinic:

Calgary:	(403) 944-7111
Edmonton:	(780) 735-0010
Fort McMurray:	(780) 791-6263
Grande Prairie:	(780) 513-7551
Lethbridge:	(403) 320-0110
Red Deer:	(403) 346-8336

Or

Health Link Alberta (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Edmonton, call 408-LINK (5465)

Calgary, call 943-LINK (5465)

Outside the Edmonton

and Calgary local calling areas,

call toll-free 1-866-408-LINK (5465)

STI/HIV Information Line 1-800-772-2437

Visit: www.health.gov.ab.ca

Thank you to the Contraceptive Health Information Working Group, who developed this resource.

Alberta