

# EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

If you had sex without contraception, or had problems with your regular method (missed pills, broken condom), emergency contraception can help prevent unplanned pregnancy.

There are two types of emergency contraception that you can use:

- » the emergency contraception pill (ECP)
- » the copper IUD (Cu-IUD).

## What is the emergency contraception pill (ECP)?

The ECP is sometimes called the 'morning-after pill'. It contains a high dose of progestogen hormone. The ECP does NOT have to be taken in the morning. It prevents about 85 per cent of expected pregnancies if taken within three days of having sex. The ECP is not an abortion pill. If you are already pregnant, ECP will not work.

Emergency contraception pills are available from the chemist with no prescription.

## How do I take ECP?

ECP should be taken as soon as possible after having unprotected sex, ideally within 24 hours (one day), but it still works well if taken within 96 hours (four days). You can take ECP within 96 to 120 hours (5 days) after having unprotected sex, but it won't be very effective. The emergency pill is available from the chemist with no prescription.

The ECP is given either as a single tablet (1.5mg) OR as two tablets (750mcg).

Some medicines can reduce the effectiveness of ECP and you may need a larger dose. Discuss any medications you are taking with the pharmacist or doctor before taking ECP.

If you vomit less than two hours after you take the ECP, you should take another dose. If vomiting occurs MORE than two hours after taking it, there is no need to take another dose.

## What are the possible side effects?

Side effects are uncommon but some women feel sick in the stomach or have tender breasts or headaches. Some women may have an irregular period after taking ECP.

You should talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist after taking ECP if:

- » you think you might be pregnant
- » your next period is more than seven days late
- » your period is shorter or lighter than usual
- » you have any sudden or unusual pain in your lower abdomen (this could be a sign of an ectopic pregnancy, where a fertilised egg sticks outside the womb – this is rare but serious and needs immediate medical attention).

## Where can I get the ECP?

You can get the emergency pill from your local chemist or pharmacy. The pharmacist may ask you questions about your health to make sure the emergency pill is safe for you to take.

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

## What is the copper intrauterine device (Cu-IUD)?

The Cu-IUD is a small contraceptive device placed in your uterus. When it is inserted within five days of unprotected sex it is a very effective method of emergency contraception. This can only be done by specially trained doctors and nurses.

A copper IUD can also be used as ongoing contraception.

## Ongoing contraception

The ECP does not reduce the risk of pregnancy if you have sex again. It is safe to take the ECP more than once in a single menstrual cycle. However, using a reliable form of contraception is the best protection against unintended pregnancy. A health professional can discuss contraceptive options with you.

### Did you know?

- » You have the right to access contraception and control your fertility.
- » You can choose to use contraception that is temporary and reversible.
- » There are methods of contraception that do not have to involve your partner.
- » Some contraception is available relatively cheaply from some providers.
- » Most women who use contraception have little trouble with side effects.
- » There are types of contraception that you don't have to remember to use every day. They can last from three to ten years. They are called LARCs or Long Acting Reversible Contraception.

## A condom is always a good idea

**No matter what contraception you choose, using a condom is the only way to protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).**

One of the most common STIs in Australia is chlamydia. Chlamydia can lead to infertility if left untreated. Using a condom every time you have sex is your best protection against HIV/AIDS and other STIs. **Other contraception will not protect you against sexually transmitted infections.**

### The male condom

The male condom is a fine rubber or synthetic sheath that is worn on an erect (stiff) penis. It collects the sperm and stops them entering the vagina and uterus (where a baby grows).

You must use a new condom every time you have sex and take care to put it on and take it off correctly. Condoms are for single use only and can be bought at pharmacies (chemists) and some supermarkets.

## Where to get more information

- » Your local doctor (GP)
- » Your local pharmacist
- » Nurse on Call – 1300 60 60 24
- » **Family Planning Victoria**  
Tel: 03 9257 0100 or 1800 013 952 (freecall)  
Web: www.fpv.org.au
- » **Women's Medicines Information Service**  
Tel: (03) 8345 3190  
Email: drug.information@thewomens.org.au

### Related fact sheets

- » Contraception – Your Choices
- » Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC)
- » The Contraceptive Pill