



Emergency contraception

If you're having sex with a male and you don't want to get pregnant, you need to use contraception. Contraception is also called birth control or family planning.

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'. There are two types of ECP, levonorgestrel (multiple brands) and ulipristal acetate (sold as EllaOne™).

The ECP does NOT have to be taken in the morning.

It prevents about 85 per cent of expected pregnancies. Ulipristal acetate is more effective than levonorgestrel.

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 the ECP?

The 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) or 120 hours (five days) depending on the type.

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

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

What are the possible side effects?

Side effects are uncommon, but some users feel sick in the stomach or have tender breasts or headaches. Some 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.

Do you need an interpreter?



If you need an interpreter, remember you can ask for one.

For more information

- Your local doctor (GP)
- Your local chemist/pharmacist
- 1800 My Options
1800 696 784 - 1800myoptions.org.au
- Sexual Health Victoria
1800 013 952 - shvic.org.au
- Women's Welcome Centre (Victoria only)
(03) 8345 3037
1800 442 007 (rural callers)
wwcadmin@thewomens.org.au

Related information from the Women's

To learn more about your contraception options or to download a fact sheet, visit our website. Information is also available in a range of community languages.

thewomens.org.au/contraception

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

Support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.
1800 737 732 (24 hour support service)
1800respect.org.au

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 contraception users 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.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby's healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.
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