

Emergency Contraception

Description:

Emergency contraception can be used to prevent pregnancy after sex. This could happen:

- *if no contraception has been used*
- *if a condom has broken*
- *if a woman has been sexually assaulted*

Emergency contraception does not prevent sexually transmissible infections.

Do's

Women who are sexually active are advised to talk with their local doctor, family planning clinic or sexual health clinic about reliable contraceptive methods and safer sexual behaviours.

Tips

Several methods of emergency contraception are available including the emergency contraceptive pill and the intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD).

The emergency contraceptive pill (sometimes called the morning after pill) contains special doses of the female hormones oestrogen and progestogen. These hormones are used in different doses in oral contraceptive pills. The emergency contraceptive pill may be either oestrogen and progestogen together, or just progestogen alone. The tablets are taken in two doses, 12 hours apart.

Sometimes the intrauterine contraceptive device is also used as emergency contraception. This is a device inserted through the cervix into the uterus (womb) to provide long term contraception. It may not be suitable for some women. You can ask your doctor, sexual health service or family planning clinic for more information.

Any woman can take the emergency contraceptive pill. Women who cannot take the oral contraceptive pill are able to take the emergency contraceptive pill.

The emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) can prevent pregnancy in a couple of ways:

- If ovulation has not already occurred, it can delay ovulation – this means a delay in the egg being released from the ovary, so fertilisation cannot occur.
- If an egg has been released and has been fertilised by sperm, the ECP can prevent the fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus. This means a pregnancy cannot develop.

If a woman is already pregnant and that pregnancy is already planted into the uterus, ECP will have no effect on that pregnancy.

The risk of becoming pregnant after taking the ECP is between one and three per cent. That is, for every 100 women who use ECP following an episode of unprotected sex, between one and three will become pregnant. ECP is more reliable if it is taken within 12 hours of the episode of unprotected sex.

ECP is more likely to fail if:

- it is more than three days since the episode of unprotected sex
- if a woman has unprotected sex again before her next period
- if a woman vomits after taking the ECP.

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Helpful Hints

The common side effects of the emergency contraceptive pill includes:

- nausea (feeling like vomiting) which occurs in up to half of all women given ECP
- vomiting, which can occur but is less likely with newer preparations. If vomiting occurs within two hours, the dose should be repeated.
- the next period may be early or delayed or come at the due time.

Tablets can be taken before the ECP to prevent nausea and vomiting.

Practical Advice

For more information about emergency contraception, you can talk to:

- your local doctor
- your local sexual health
- your local family planning clinic.

Other Resources

[Queensland Health Sexual Health website](#)

[Family Planning Queensland website](#)