



FACT SHEET

TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

What is emergency contraception?

- Emergency contraception is a way of preventing pregnancy after unprotected sex.
- The most common type of emergency contraception involves taking hormonal pills (usually pills that only have one hormone: progestin). These pills can prevent a pregnancy if taken within 120 hours or up to 5 days of having unprotected sex. In the past these pills have been called morning-after pills. This name is confusing because emergency contraception works for at least 5 days after having unprotected sex. The earlier the pills are taken, the better they work.
- The copper intrauterine device (IUD) can be used as emergency contraception if placed in the uterus within 5 days of unprotected sex.

What types of emergency contraception are available?

- In the United States, there are two common types of emergency contraception:
 1. Plan B One-Step and Next Choice, which contain a hormone called progestin. Because nausea is less common with these methods and they work better than the methods described in Table 1, many doctors favor these medications. No nausea medication is needed before taking these medications.
 2. A specific number (depending on the brand) of birth control pills that contain the hormones estrogen and progestin are listed in Table 1. Because the number of pills changes depending on what type of pill is used, a health

care practitioner must prescribe these pills. Because nausea is common with high dose pills, it is recommended that you take a medicine to prevent nausea 30 minutes to one hour before taking these pills.

- The copper IUD is a small T-shaped device that is placed in the uterus. It is very effective in preventing pregnancy. You must visit a health care provider if you decide to use this method as emergency contraception.

How does emergency contraception work?

- The main way emergency contraception works is by stopping or delaying ovulation (the release of an egg) so it cannot be fertilized.
- Emergency contraception does not work once the fertilized egg is attached to the lining of the uterus (ie, once pregnant) so it will not cause a miscarriage or an abortion. It also does not harm a pregnancy if taken after a woman is already pregnant.

When should you use emergency contraception?

- If you have had intercourse without using any protection, if the protection was unreliable, or if the birth control method was not used correctly. Not using protection correctly includes using the withdrawal method, which does not work.
- If your partner used a condom, but it broke or slipped.
- If you missed a contraceptive shot.
- If you missed taking two or more active birth control pills.
- If you had a contraceptive patch come off for more than 24 hours during the patch-on weeks.

- If you remove a vaginal contraceptive ring for more than 3 hours during the ring-in weeks.
- If you were forced to have sex (raped).

Where can you get emergency contraception?

- In each of the previously listed cases, you should call your health care provider, contact a health center or family planning clinic, or call an emergency department to get emergency contraception. If you are 17 years old or older, you can go to a pharmacist and ask for emergency contraception, which is kept behind the counter and available without a prescription. You may want to call the pharmacy first to be sure you can buy emergency contraception there without a prescription. If you are younger than 17 years you need a prescription from your doctor to get emergency contraception.
- You also can call (888) not-2-late ([888] 668-2-5283) to find a local health care provider or pharmacy that can provide you with emergency contraception.
- Some health care providers will write out a prescription for emergency contraception in advance so you can have immediate access to the pills should you need them. You can ask your health care provider for an advance prescription.

What else should you know about emergency contraception?

- It is important to take the first dose of medicine within 120 hours (5 days) of having unprotected or underprotected sex. It is best to take it as soon as possible.
- It does not matter where you are in your menstrual cycle. If you have unprotected or underprotected sex, emergency



Table 1. Birth Control Pills Used for Emergency Contraception^a

Brand	Company	First Dose ^b	Second Dose ^b (12 hours later)	Ethinyl Estradiol per Dose (µg)	Levonorgestrel per Dose (mg) ^c
Progestin-only pills					
Next Choice	Watson	2 peach pills	None ^b	0	1.5
Plan B One-Step	Teva	1 white pill	None	0	1.5
Combined progestin and estrogen pills					
Aviane	Teva	5 orange pills	5 orange pills	100	0.50
Cryselle	Teva	4 white pills	4 white pills	120	0.60
Enpresse	Teva	4 orange pills	4 orange pills	120	0.50
Jolessa	Teva	4 pink pills	4 pink pills	120	0.60
Lessina	Teva	5 pink pills	5 pink pills	100	0.50
Levora	Watson	4 white pills	4 white pills	120	0.60
Lo/Ovral	Akrimax	4 white pills	4 white pills	120	0.60
LoSeasonique	Teva	5 orange pills	5 orange pills	100	0.50
Low-Ogestrel	Watson	4 white pills	4 white pills	120	0.60
Lutera	Watson	5 white pills	5 white pills	100	0.50
Lybrel	Wyeth	6 yellow pills	6 yellow pills	120	0.54
Nordette	Teva	4 light-orange pills	4 light-orange pills	120	0.60
Ogestrel	Watson	2 white pills	2 white pills	100	0.50
Portia	Teva	4 pink pills	4 pink pills	120	0.60
Quasense	Watson	4 white pills	4 white pills	120	0.60
Seasonale	Teva	4 pink pills	4 pink pills	120	0.60
Seasonique	Teva	4 light-blue-green pills	4 light-blue-green pills	120	0.60
Sronyx	Watson	5 white pills	5 white pills	100	0.50
Trivora	Watson	4 pink pills	4 pink pills	120	0.50

^a Plan B One-Step and Next Choice are the only dedicated product specifically marketed for emergency contraception. Aviane, Cryselle, Enpresse, Jolessa, Lessina, Levora, Lo/Ovral, LoSeasonique, Low-Ogestrel, Lutera, Lybrel, Nordette, Ogestrel, Portia, Quasense, Seasonale, Seasonique, Sronyx and Trivora have been declared safe and effective for use as ECPs by the United States Food and Drug Administration. Outside the United States, about 100 emergency contraceptive products are specifically packaged, labeled, and marketed. Levonorgestrel-only ECPs are available either over-the-counter or from a pharmacist without having to see a clinician in 60 countries. Plan B One-Step and Next Choice are available over-the-counter to women and men aged 17 and older; Plan B is available over-the-counter to women and men aged 18 and older. You can buy these pills by prescription if you are younger.

^b The label for Next Choice says to take one pill within 72 hours after unprotected intercourse, and another pill 12 hours later. However, recent research has found that both pills can be taken at the same time. Research has also shown that that all of the brands listed here are effective when used within 120 hours after unprotected sex.

^c The progestin in Cryselle, Lo/Ovral, Low-Ogestrel and Ogestrel is norgestrel, which contains two isomers, only one of which (levonorgestrel) is bioactive; the amount of norgestrel in each tablet is twice the amount of levonorgestrel.

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals, Princeton University Office of Population Research. The emergency contraception website: answers to frequently asked questions about types of emergency contraception. Washington, DC: ARHP: Princeton (NJ): OPR; 2010. Available at: <http://ec.princeton.edu/questions/dose.html#dose>. Retrieved April 23, 2010.

contraception is a good way to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. Emergency contraception pills should not be relied on as an ongoing birth control method. It is not as effective as many ongoing methods, such as birth control pills or the vaginal hormonal ring.

- Emergency contraception offers no protection against sexually transmitted diseases, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), herpes, or human papillomavirus. For this reason, you also should see a health care provider to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases after having unprotected sex or having changed sexual partners.
- Emergency contraception pills only work after having unprotected sex and will not protect you for the rest of your menstrual cycle. It is critical to use a barrier method of contraception, such as a condom, every time you have sex.
- If you use emergency contraception, you should talk about future birth control needs with your health care provider. If you use the copper IUD for emergency contraception, you may continue to use it as a long-term contraception method.
- Using emergency contraception pills may change your next menstrual cycle.

- If you use emergency contraception pills, you may have your periods earlier or later than expected.
- If no period has occurred within 21 days after taking emergency contraception, then you should see your health care provider to be sure you are not pregnant.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444
Web: www.acog.org

American Society for Emergency Contraception Association for Reproductive Health Professionals

Telephone: (202) 466-3825
Web: <http://emergencycontraception.org/asec/index.html>

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals

Telephone: (202) 466-3825
Web: www.arhp.org

AWARE Foundation

Telephone: (215) 955-9847
Web: www.awarefoundation.org

Center for Young Women's Health

Telephone: (617) 355- 2994
Web: www.youngwomenshealth.org

The Emergency Contraception Website

Office Population Research, Princeton University
Telephone: (888) NOT-2-LATE or (609) 258-4870
Web: <http://ec.princeton.edu>

Go Ask Alice

Telephone (212) 854-5453
Web: www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association

Telephone: (202) 293-3114
Web: www.nfprha.org/main/index.cfm?Category=Main&Section=Main

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Telephone: (800) 230-PLAN (7526) or (212) 541-7800
Web: www.plannedparenthood.org

Sex, Etc.

Center for Applied Psychology
Rutgers University
Web: www.sexetc.org

Sexuality Information and Education

Council of the United States (SIECUS)

Telephone: (212) 819-9770
Web: www.siecus.org

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

Telephone: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192
Web: http://sogc.medical.org/index_e.asp
www.sexualityandu.ca/home_e.aspx