

Emergency contraception fact sheet

Also known as morning after pill

If you had sex with no contraception, emergency contraception can help prevent pregnancy.

Quick facts

- Emergency contraceptive pills work around 85% of the time in preventing pregnancy
- You should take emergency contraceptive pills as soon as possible after sex with no contraception
- You can buy emergency contraceptive pills from a pharmacy. A prescription is not needed
- Copper IUD insertion is more than 99% effective at preventing pregnancy, but is more expensive and difficult to access

What is this?

Emergency contraception can help prevent pregnancy if you had sex with no contraceptive protection. For example:

- the condom broke or slipped
- you forgot to take your regular contraceptive pill
- you vomited within a few hours of taking your regular contraceptive pill
- you didn't use any contraception

What is the risk of pregnancy?

About 8% of women will become pregnant after one single episode of sex without contraception. This is reduced to below 1% if emergency contraception is used. All methods are more effective if taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex.

How do you get it?

There are three recommended methods of emergency contraception. If you are already on hormonal contraception, also known as 'the pill', speak to your doctor or pharmacist about which method is right for you.

Levonorgestrel

- A single dose of progesterone.
- Levonorgestrel can be bought at any pharmacy.
- A prescription from a doctor is not needed.
- There are multiple brands, including Norlevo-1®, Postinor-1® and Levonelle-1®.
- It is most effective if taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex, but can be taken up to 96 hours later.
- If you are already taking hormonal contraception ('the pill'), you can continue to take the pill as usual
- If you want to start taking hormonal contraception ('the pill'), you can start on the same day as taking levonorgestrel

Ulipristal acetate

- A single dose of an antiprogestrone.
- It can be bought at any pharmacy under the brand name EllaOne®.
- A prescription from a doctor is not needed.
- It is more effective but more expensive than levonorgestrel.
- It can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected sex.
- If you are already taking hormonal contraception ('the pill'), you should stop or delay taking the pill for 5 days after taking ulipristal acetate as they may counteract each other and reduce efficacy. You should use a different method of contraception during this time.

Copper IUD

- Copper IUD inserted within 5 days of unprotected sex, or no more than 5 days after ovulation if sex occurred earlier in the cycle.
- The most effective method of emergency contraception.
- A copper IUD must be inserted by a trained IUD inserter, such as [Sexual Health Victoria](#).
- This procedure is more expensive and can be difficult to arrange in time.

Are there any safety issues?

Levonorgestrel and ulipristal acetate should not be taken together as they counteract each other.

Levonorgestrel and ulipristal acetate:

- work by preventing or delaying ovulation
- do not cause abortion
- do not harm a pregnancy if taken by mistake when pregnant
- are safe
- do not affect long term fertility
- do not provide ongoing contraception

Side effects

Side effects are usually mild and short lived. There is a small chance of:

- nausea
- bloating
- period pain
- dizziness
- breast tenderness
- headache
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When to expect your next period

Your next period will usually come on time, but using emergency contraception can result in an early or delayed period.

If your next period is unusually late or light or unusual in any way you should have a follow up pregnancy test.

Some women have light bleeding in the week after using emergency contraception that is not related to a period.

Disclaimer

This fact sheet provides general sexual health information and is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your doctor.

If you need urgent care, go to your nearest Emergency Department or call-000.