

Emergency Contraception

Emergency Contraceptive Pills
or ECPs



Balanced Counseling Strategy



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General information:

- The only method that can help prevent pregnancy after a woman has had sex.
- Must be used within 5 days of having unprotected sex.
- Safe for women who cannot use hormonal contraceptive methods.
- Not recommended for regular use. It is not effective as a continuous method of contraception.
- ECPs do not disrupt existing pregnancy.
- Safe for a woman with HIV/AIDS, even if she takes antiretroviral (ARV) medicines.
- Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

Effectiveness for pregnancy prevention: When taken within 5 days of having unprotected sex:

- With ECPs — 1 to 2 pregnancies per 100 women (1 to 2%)
- Normally (no ECPs) — 8 pregnancies per 100 women (8%)

How method works:

- ECPs contain the same hormones as combined and progestin-only oral contraceptive pills, but in higher doses.
- These hormones prevent the release of eggs from your ovaries (ovulation).

Important facts:

- You can use ECPs if there has been forced sex (rape) or any unprotected sex.
- You can also use them if there have been contraceptive mistakes or failures, such as:
 - Condom broke, slipped, or was not used correctly.
 - You missed 3 or more combined oral contraceptive pills.
 - You started a new packet of pills 3 or more days late.
 - You are more than 7 days or 2 weeks late for a repeat injection of injectable contraceptive (depending on type of injection).

- Your IUD has come out of place.
- You used TwoDay or Standard Days Method incorrectly. For example, you failed to abstain from sex or use condoms during the days you can get pregnant.
- ECPs reduce the need to seek abortion.
- Special ECP products, combined oral contraceptives (the pill), or progestin-only oral contraceptives (minipill) can all be used as ECPs.
- Have an ECP method on hand in case of an emergency (unprotected sex).
- They should not be used in place of an ongoing contraception method.
- You can become pregnant immediately after taking ECPs if you have unprotected sex (even 1 day after taking ECPs).
- Use another method of contraception at once to continue to protect against pregnancy.
- Does not protect against STIs, including HIV.
- Use condoms (male or female) if you feel at risk of STIs, including HIV.

Side effects:

- You may have light vaginal bleeding for 1–2 days after taking ECPs.
- In the week after taking ECPs, you may have nausea, abdominal pain, fatigue, headache, breast tenderness, dizziness, or vomiting.
- Your monthly bleeding may start earlier or later than expected.

How to use:

- Take the ECPs as soon as possible within 5 days of having unprotected sex. The sooner you take them, the better. The effectiveness of ECPs decreases over time.
- Take the pills as directed by your provider.

Important: Dosage varies according to brand. Your provider will give you dosage information according to the brand or type of pill.

- If you vomit within 2 hours of taking ECPs, take another dose. If you vomit 2 hours after taking ECPs, you do not need to take another dose.
- Start another method of contraception at once. ECPs are not effective as an ongoing method of contraception.
- Take a packet of ECPs (or oral contraceptive pills, with instructions on how to use them as ECPs) home to use when you need them.

Return to the health care facility any time if:

- You have questions or problems.
- You think you might be pregnant.