



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Emergency Contraception ("Morning After Pill")

Women's Health Clinic uses an emergency contraception pill (ECP) with high dose of a hormone called levonorgestrel. The pill is called Plan B.

How does ECP work?

It is unclear exactly how ECP works. It likely delays or prevents the release of an egg (ovum).

If you are already pregnant, taking ECP will not end your pregnancy.

How effective is it?

You can take ECP up to five days after having unprotected intercourse. The sooner you take it, the better it works.

ECP will prevent pregnancy (1):

- » 95% of the time when taken within 24 hours
- » 85% of the time when taken within 25 - 48 hours
- » 58% of the time when taken within 49 -72 hours

The dose is two pills. You can take them both at once (1.5 mgs) or take two doses of 0.75 mgs twelve hours apart. Both ways are just as effective.

What are the advantages?

- » Emergency contraception is a good back-up method if birth control was missed or failed (if a condom breaks).
- » Levonorgestrel has fewer side effects than other hormonal emergency contraceptive methods.
- » Studies have NOT shown any harm to the fetus if you are already pregnant

What are the disadvantages?

- » Cannot be used by someone who is allergic to the hormone levonorgestrel.
- » Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.
- » May cause stomach upset (26%) or vomiting (6%) or other minor side effects (see the information in the pill package).

You should consider:

- » Are you already pregnant? If your last period was abnormal or is late, take a pregnancy test before taking ECP.
- » Do you need reliable regular birth control? Do you know about your birth control options? You can talk to your health care provider or book an information session with a birth control counsellor. Your partner is welcome to attend this information session with you; it can help ensure they know how to use a condom properly to decrease the chance of the condom slipping or breaking.
- » If your pap test up to date? If you're not sure, talk to your health care provider.
- » If you've had unprotected sex or condom failure, you are also at risk for sexually transmitted infections. Talk to your health care provider about STI testing.

How do I use emergency contraception?

The health care provider will discuss your health history with you to see if emergency contraception is appropriate for you.

The dose is two pills. You may take both of them at the same time or 12 hours apart. Taking the pills 12 hours apart may reduce any side effects.

If you feel nauseous, you can take anti-vomiting medicine (like Gravol TM). You can buy it at a drug store without a prescription.

If you vomit within one hour of taking ECP, you may need to take it again. If you are taking ECP in two doses, take your second dose and contact the clinic.

You should get your period within three weeks of taking ECP. It is important to check with your health care provider to make sure you are not still pregnant or to rule out ectopic pregnancy if:

- » you do not get your period within 3 weeks
- » your period is lighter than normal
- » you have abdominal or pelvic pain after using ECP

Emergency contraceptives are not intended to be a regular form of birth control because they are less effective than other methods.

What is the cost?

One ECP treatment costs WHC \$10. If you can pay all or part of that cost, it helps ensure that this service is available to all women who need it. Let your health care provider know if you have a drug plan that covers prescription costs. She will give you a prescription you can fill at any drugstore. If you cannot pay, we can give you the pills free of charge.

How can I get emergency contraception?

You can get Plan B at Women's Health Clinic, other community health clinics, walk-in clinics and family doctors' offices. You can also get it at many drug stores without a prescription, but it's behind the counter so you need to speak to a pharmacist to get it.

For more information, call Health Links at 782-8200.

References:

1. Dunn S, Guilbert E, Emergency Contraception. JOGC No. 131, August 2003 p. 673-679.

Disclaimer: We provide this health information for your learning only. It should not be used to replace a visit with a health care provider.

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