

Where can you get EC?

EC is behind-the-counter (a prescription is not required) if you are a woman or man age 18 or older. You can get EC at a pharmacy, drug store or a family planning clinic. In some states, you can receive EC directly from a pharmacist. If you are younger than 18, or if you need a prescription for insurance reimbursement, you can contact a health care provider. For a local EC provider, call the emergency contraception national toll-free hotline (1-888-NOT-2-LATE) or visit the website www.not-2-late.com.

You can buy Plan B® in advance to have on hand if you need it. If you already have a pack of regular birth control pills, you may be able to use them for emergency contraception. For more information (English, Spanish, French, and Arabic) about EC visit the website www.not-2-late.com.

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Emergency Contraceptive (EC) Pills

How emergency contraceptive pills work:

Emergency contraceptive (EC) pills are used AFTER sexual intercourse. EC (also called the “morning after pill”) reduces the risk of pregnancy when taken as soon as possible or within 5 days after sexual intercourse. Effectiveness of EC goes down gradually and generally won’t work if you wait more than 120 hours (5 days).



The way EC works depends on when a woman takes it during her “monthly” menstrual cycle. Early in her cycle, EC can stop her body from releasing an egg (ovulation), so there is no egg present to be fertilized. EC may be effective after ovulation, but currently there is no evidence that shows that it works after ovulation or fertilization has occurred.

Emergency contraception may prevent pregnancy, but it will NOT stop an already-established pregnancy or harm a developing fetus. EC does NOT cause abortion.

How to use emergency contraceptive pills:

Plan B® (progestin-only) is two pills and can be taken in one dose or in two doses 12 hours apart. Combination EC (estrogen and progestin) is also available. These pills must be taken as directed by a health provider or pharmacist, as soon as possible (within 5 days) after unprotected sex.

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If your period does not start within three weeks, see your doctor or health provider for an exam and a pregnancy test. Do not have unprotected sex in the days or weeks following EC; use condoms and/or another birth control method until you get your period.

Effectiveness:

Effectiveness rates for EC are different from other birth control methods because the effectiveness rate is based on a one-time use. Studies show a range of effectiveness, depending on how soon after sex EC is taken. If EC is taken within 72 hours (3 days) after sexual intercourse, the risk of pregnancy is reduced by 75% - 89%. In other words, only 1-2 women out of 100 will get pregnant instead of 8 in 100 women getting pregnant without taking EC.

EC is not recommended for routine use because it is less effective than other available contraceptives.

Benefits of EC:

Emergency contraceptive pills are available if you aren't using birth control at the time of sexual intercourse, or if:

- The condom (male or female) slips, breaks or leaks.
- You missed your birth control pills.
- Your diaphragm or cervical cap was inserted incorrectly or removed too early.
- You used any other birth control method incorrectly.
- You were exposed to some medicines, drugs or other toxic agents (which can reduce the effectiveness of some methods).
- You had unprotected sex against your will.

Potential side effects and disadvantages:

There are few reported side effects with EC. Some women do report nausea. Medicine for nausea is available. Ask your doctor, health care provider or a pharmacist. Other possible complaints could be fatigue, breast tenderness, headache, abdominal pain and dizziness. EC may change the amount, duration, and timing of the next menstrual period.

Potential risks:

There are no known health risks. EC does not harm a developing fetus. Repeated use is considered safe.

EC offers no protection against HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, herpes, genital warts (HPV), gonorrhea, hepatitis B and syphilis. If unprotected sex puts you at risk for an unintended pregnancy, you may want to be tested for HIV and STIs.