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Planned Parenthood is the nation's leading provider and advocate of high-quality, affordable health care for women, men, and young people, as well as the nation's largest provider of sex education. With approximately 700 health centers across the country, Planned Parenthood organizations serve all patients with care and compassion, with respect and without judgment. Through health centers, programs in schools and communities, and online resources, Planned Parenthood is a trusted source of reliable health information that allows people to make informed health decisions. We do all this because we care passionately about helping people lead healthier lives.

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What You Should Know About Emergency Contraception
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Birth Control Series

What You Should Know About Emergency Contraception

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TOP 3 THINGS

What you should know about emergency contraception (EC)

1. EC can prevent pregnancy after you have had unprotected vaginal sex.
2. EC must be used within 120 hours (5 days) after vaginal sex.
3. There are two different kinds of EC:
   - Copper IUD (ParaGard®)
   - Emergency contraception pills

You can use EC if:

- You weren't using any birth control when you had sex.
- You made a mistake with your regular birth control.
- The condom broke or slipped off.
- Your partner didn't pull out in time.
- You were forced to have unprotected vaginal sex.

Copper (ParaGard) IUD as Emergency Contraception

The ParaGard IUD can be used for emergency contraception if put in within 5 days after sex. It is the most effective kind of EC. The IUD is a birth control method that is put into your uterus (womb) by a doctor or nurse and it can stay there as birth control for up to 12 years if you want. It works really well (99% effective) and you don't have to do anything once it's in.

How the IUD Works

Pregnancy doesn't happen right after sex. It can take up to 6 days for the sperm and egg to meet after having sex. The IUD works mostly by changing the way sperm move so they can't join with an egg. If sperm cannot join with an egg, pregnancy cannot happen.

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Emergency Contraception Pills

Emergency contraception pills are also called the "morning-after pill." There are two different kinds of emergency contraception pills:

- ella® is very effective at preventing pregnancy if taken within 5 days after sex. It is the most effective EC pill, and it stays just as effective for all 5 days. If you are breastfeeding, you will have to pump and throw away the breast milk for 36 hours after taking it.

- Levonorgestrel EC pills, sold as Plan B One-Step®, Next Choice One Dose® and others, are also pretty effective. You can take these up to 5 days after having sex but they work better the sooner you take them. They may also be less effective for overweight women.

How EC Pills Work

Emergency contraception pills work by keeping a woman's ovary from releasing an egg for longer than usual. Pregnancy cannot happen if there is no egg to join with sperm. EC will not hurt an existing pregnancy or cause an abortion.

If You Are Overweight or Obese

Levonorgestrel EC pills may not work as well for overweight or obese women. If you are overweight or obese, the best kind of EC for you is the IUD. If you can't get an IUD, use ella.

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How to Get EC Pills

Anyone, regardless of age or gender, can get EC pills (except ella) over-the-counter, without a prescription, at their local drugstore. You will usually find it in the family planning aisle or near the pharmacy. If you don't see it there, ask the pharmacist. You need a prescription for ella. You can ask your doctor or nurse, or go to www.ella-kwikmed.com to get a prescription and buy ella online.

The cost of emergency contraception pills depends on your insurance, where you live, and whether you get it from the drugstore or a health center. You may be able to get it cheaper at a Planned Parenthood health center. It may cost anywhere from $10 to $70.

Get EC Before You Need It

You may want to buy EC or ask your doctor or nurse for a prescription for ella before you need it. This way, you will have it when you need it and can take it quickly.

Possible Side Effects

- Your next period may come earlier or later than usual.
- You may have more or less bleeding than usual during your next period.
- Your breasts may feel sore, and you might be dizzy or have headaches.
- You may feel nauseous after taking EC. If you vomit within three hours of taking EC, you need to take it again.
- Using EC a lot may make your periods happen at different times each month.

There have been no serious complications among the millions of women who have used EC pills. Side effects usually stop after a day or two.

After You Take EC

- EC does not always work. If you do not get your period within three weeks of taking EC, or if you have symptoms of pregnancy such as having to pee a lot, being very tired, or feeling nauseous, you should take a pregnancy test.
- It is safe to use EC as often as you need it. But, if you find yourself using it a lot, you may want to consider using a better birth control method like the IUD, shot, or pill.

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EC and Sexually Transmitted Infections

Emergency contraception does not protect you from getting a sexually transmitted infection. You should talk to a doctor or nurse about getting tested.

Choosing What Type of EC to Use

Here are some things to think about if you need EC:

- The Copper IUD is the most effective type of EC. It can be used as your regular birth control for up to 12 years. The most effective EC pill is ella.
- Levonorgestrel EC pills are the easiest to get quickly because you can buy them over-the-counter, without a prescription, in a drugstore.
- Levonorgestrel EC pills may not work as well for women who are overweight. The IUD or ella is a better option.

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