



Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception (birth control) is a method used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse. The most common method consists of taking hormone pills (usually high-dose birth control pills, doses 12 hours apart) as soon after intercourse as possible.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this method depends on how soon the pills are taken after unprotected intercourse. If 100 women have unprotected intercourse during the second or third week of the menstrual cycle, eight are likely to become pregnant. If emergency birth control pills are used within 72 hours of intercourse, 2 will become pregnant. The earlier they are taken, the more effective they will be.

How it works

The hormone pills interfere with ovulation and implantation of an embryo into the lining of the uterus in the same way that birth control pills taken regularly work. If implantation has already occurred, the pills have no effect. They do not cause an abortion.

Side Effects and Risks

Nausea and/or vomiting can occur. Anti-nausea medicine can be prescribed. Less often, breast pain or heavy bleeding can occur. Most women will have a period within 3 weeks. Blood clots, which are a risk for women who use birth control pills regularly, have not been shown to be more common in women using emergency doses of birth control pills.

When to consider using this method

- Intercourse without contraceptive protection, including ejaculation on the

outside of the vagina or withdrawal method (not considered adequate birth control)

- Barrier method (condom, diaphragm) inserted incorrectly, dislodged, torn or removed too early
- IUD fell out
- Failure to take birth control pills (three or more) in two weeks preceding intercourse
- Sexual assault

This method should not be used if you are already pregnant. If you're not sure, call and discuss this with us.

If it doesn't work

If you do not have bleeding 3 weeks after using these pills, a pregnancy test should be done. A home test is accurate. If you do become pregnant despite using these pills, there is no harm done to the baby.

How to obtain

The most frequently used pill, Plan B®, is now available over the counter for women over age 18, although a prescription is required for those 17 and younger. More information is can be found online at <http://www.gotoplanb.com>. Other birth control pills can also be used. Call us anytime during office hours or weekend daytime hours to request the pills or information on their use.

Many women who are quite responsible have occasion to need emergency contraception. If it is needed often, however, be sure to speak with your health care provider about other birth control methods.

