

## Birth Control: Emergency Contraception (EC)

Emergency Contraception (EC) (Picture 1) is birth control that keeps you from getting pregnant after unprotected or inadequately protected sex. It comes in two forms: an **intrauterine device (IUD)** or a **pill** (sometimes known as “The Morning After Pill”).

- The copper IUD (Paragard®) is the most effective form of EC. It works by keeping sperm from fertilizing the egg.
- There are two pill versions of EC: ulipristal acetate (Ella®) and levonorgestrel (Plan B®, Next Choice®). The pills work by keeping the ovary from releasing an egg (ovulation). Ella® is the most effective EC pill.

### Advantages of EC

- EC can prevent pregnancy for up to 5 days after unprotected sex. However, it is more effective in the first 24 hours.
- The pills are available as a one-dose option.
- Plan B® is available over-the-counter at pharmacies without a prescription.
- The Copper IUD provides ongoing birth control for up to 10 years.

### Disadvantages of EC

- The copper IUD is put into place by a trained healthcare provider in an office.
- Ella® should not be used at the same time as hormonal birth control.
- You must have a prescription to get Ella®.
- The pill forms should not be used as long-term birth control.



**Picture 1** Emergency contraception tablet

## How to use it

- Start EC as soon as you can after unprotected or inadequately protected sex.
- EC users should consider starting a regular form of birth control.
- You can start your regular birth control the same day you use Plan B<sup>®</sup> or Next Choice<sup>®</sup>.
- Delay using hormonal birth control until 5 days after using Ella<sup>®</sup>.

You should have a pregnancy test if you have not had a period within 3 weeks of using EC.

## Risks

- **Possible side effects of the pill:** nausea, headache, and irregular bleeding
- **Possible side effects of a copper IUD:** irregular bleeding and painful periods

## When to call the doctor

Call the doctor or healthcare provider if you:

- think you are pregnant.
- think you might have a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

## When to go to the emergency room

Go straight to the emergency room if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Irregular bleeding that will not go away
- Lower belly (abdominal) pain that will not go away
- Sudden change in vision
- Very bad headache
- Unusual pain in your chest
- Trouble breathing or speaking
- Weakness or numbness
- Unusual pain or swelling in the legs

## Preventing STIs

**Emergency contraception does not protect against (STIs).** Condoms are the best way for sexually active people to reduce the risk of infection. Always use a condom when you have sex. Get yearly health check-ups, including testing for STIs.