Birth Control: Emergency Contraception (EC)

Emergency contraception (EC) is birth control that keeps you from getting pregnant after unprotected or inadequately protected sex (Picture 1).

It comes in two forms: an intrauterine device (IUD) or a pill (sometimes known as “The Morning After Pill”).

- **There are two IUD versions of EC:** the copper IUD (Paragard®) or a hormonal IUD (Mirena® or Liletta®). These are the most effective form of EC. They work 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 works best 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 IUD provides ongoing birth control for 6 to 10 years depending on the type.

**Disadvantages of EC**

- The IUD is put into place by a trained health care 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 are not recommended as long-term birth control.

**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® or Next Choice®. Delay using hormonal birth control until 5 days after using Ella®.

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

**Side effects**

• **Possible side effects of the pill:** nausea, headache, and irregular bleeding
• **Possible side effects of an IUD:** irregular bleeding and cramping

**When to call the health care provider**

Call the doctor or health care 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 • sudden change in vision
• lower belly pain that will not go away • 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.