

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[®] 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.

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.