Emergency Contraception

What is emergency contraception? (Plan B)

Emergency contraception is used to help keep a woman from getting pregnant after having sex without using birth control or if the birth control method failed. If you are already pregnant, emergency contraception will not work.

Use emergency contraception if:
- You didn’t use birth control
- You were forced to have sex
- The condom broke or came off
- You missed at least two or three active birth control pills in a row (depending on the brand)
- You were more than two weeks late getting your birth control shot
- You have reason to think your regular birth control might have failed

Emergency contraception should not be used as regular birth control; other methods are much more effective.

Types of Emergency Contraception and How to Use It:

There are two types of emergency contraception: pills and an IUD (intrauterine device)

- **Pills:** with ECPs higher doses of the same hormones found in regular birth control pills stop pregnancy by keeping the egg from leaving the ovary or keeping the sperm from joining the egg.
  - **Plan B One-Step:** one pill available over-the-counter that contains higher levels of the hormones used in regular birth control pills and must be taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex
  - **Next Choice:** two pills available over-the-counter containing higher levels of the hormones used in regular birth control pills. The first pill is taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex and the second 12 hours after the first.
  - **Ella:** a prescription tablet FDA approved for use up to 5 days after unprotected sex; works to help prevent pregnancy by delaying ovulation for 5 days, so effectiveness does depend on the woman’s cycle

- **Intrauterine Device (IUD):** The IUD is a small, T-shaped device placed into the uterus by a doctor within 5 days after having unprotected sex. The IUD works by keeping the sperm from joining the egg or keeping a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus. Your doctor can remove the IUD after the woman’s next period; it may also be left into place for use up to 10 years as a means of regular birth control.

Effectiveness:

When used correctly, emergency contraceptive pills work very well at preventing pregnancy. About 8 in 100 women who have unprotected sex one time during the fertility will become pregnant, but if that same number were to take ECPs only about 1 or 2 will. The IUD works even better; only 1 in 1,000 women who have an IUD put in after unprotected sex will become pregnant. However, the sooner you use any type of emergency contraception after unprotected sex, the better.

Side-Effects:

Some women may feel sick after using ECPs. Vomiting, headache, dizziness, lower stomach cramps, irregular bleeding, breast tenderness, and fatigue can also occur. ECPs without estrogen cause fewer side effects than those with estrogen. The over-the-counter drug, Dramamine 2, may reduce nausea; take 2 before using ECPs. IUDs also have risks including pelvic infections or harming of the uterus, but these are quite rare. If it is left in place for birth control, cramps and heavy bleeding during the period may occur.


This and past inSTAllments can also be found at www.whittier.edu/wellnesscoalition; or sign on to My.Whittier.edu, click on Campus Life → Wellness Letter → Wellness Coalition.