



Emergency Contraception

What you need to know

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Using a regular method of birth control is the best way to prevent unwanted pregnancy. If you've had unprotected sex (sex without using birth control or if a problem occurred with the method of birth control used) there is a medication you can take – emergency contraception – that, if taken promptly, can help prevent pregnancy.

emergency contraception

What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is birth control that helps to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. It is simply a higher dose of the same hormones used in common birth control pills. It is most effective if it is taken right away, but it can still work if it is used within three days (72 hours) after unprotected sex. Emergency contraception can even be taken up to five days after unprotected sex, but the longer you wait the less likely it is that it will keep you from getting pregnant.

If you were already pregnant at the time you had unprotected sex, emergency contraception will not affect your pregnancy.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of emergency contraception as safe and effective.

What are the side effects of emergency contraception?

The side effects of emergency contraception can include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Tender breasts
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Abdominal pains/cramps

To reduce nausea, you may want to take a non-prescription anti-nausea medication such as meclizine (also sold under the brand names Dramamine II or Bonine) one hour before taking emergency contraception. Any side effects usually go away within a few days. Emergency contraception may affect your menstrual cycle. It may be early or late, light or heavy.

What do I do after I take emergency contraception?

Your chances of pregnancy as a result of unprotected sex will be greatly reduced if you take emergency contraception. However, if you are worried, you may want to make an appointment with your family doctor or your gynecologist to test you in about two weeks. If you do not get your next period at all, you should visit your doctor.

Will emergency contraception affect my chances for getting pregnant in the future?

No.

Do I still need to use some form of birth control even though I can obtain emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is meant to be used only as an emergency form of birth control after unprotected sex. It is not meant to be used as an ongoing method of birth control. Also, emergency contraception does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, like HIV (only condoms do). If you do not have a method of ongoing birth control, talk to your medical provider (obstetrician, gynecologist, midwife or other health care professional) or go to your local Family Planning Program. You may also want to consider testing for sexually transmitted infections if unprotected sex puts you at risk.

Where can I go to talk to someone or to get more information?

Contact your medical provider to discuss options for birth control. If you do not have a provider, there is at least one Family Planning Program clinic in almost every county with specially trained medical professionals who can assist you: talking with you about your concerns, providing you with information about a method of birth control that you can use regularly and providing referrals for other services.

If you have been raped, there is at least one Rape Crisis Program in your county with specially trained counselors who are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help you.

Call the hotline number listed below for a referral to the services you need.

Where do I get more information?

To get more information and a referral to a Family Planning Program or Rape Crisis Program near you:

1(800) 522-5006

TTY 1-800-655-1789

In New York City call:

General NYC Services Directory

Dial 311

Call any time, day or night, including weekends.

Your call is completely free and confidential.

Please call now!