



Emergency contraception (EC)

Emergency contraception (EC) means using a birth control method after you have had unprotected sex or when another method of birth control fails. There are 2 main types of EC:

- The morning-after pill (levonorgestrel only, combination oral contraceptive pills or ulipristal) and
- Insertion of an intrauterine device (IUD) by a doctor, midwife or nurse practitioner.

10 Facts You Need to Know about ECPs

- 1** Emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) are called the morning-after pill, but levonorgestrel can be used for up to **72 hours**, while ulipristal can be used for up to **120 hours** after unprotected sex.
- 2** Taking ECPs can greatly decrease the chance of getting pregnant after unprotected sex. **The sooner they are taken, the better they work**, so take them as soon as possible after unprotected sex and follow the directions exactly.
- 3** **The morning-after pill is not the same as the abortion pill.** EC prevents pregnancy but it does not end a pregnancy that has already occurred.
- 4** **Regularly using** (more than once a month on a regular basis) EC as the only method of preventing pregnancy is **not advisable**. Talk to your pharmacist about a regular method of birth control.
- 5** **Levonorgestrel only** pills are available in a pharmacy **without a prescription**. Take the correct number of tablets (1 or 2 as indicated in the product package information) at once, with or without food. If you vomit within 2 hours of taking the pill(s), contact your health-care provider, as a repeat dose may be required.
- 6** The **ulipristal pill** requires **a prescription**; both the prescription and the pill can be obtained from your pharmacist in most provinces. Take 1 tablet, with or without food. If you vomit within 3 hours of taking the pill, contact your health-care provider, as a repeat dose is required.
- 7** The **combination estrogen/progestogen** pills require **a prescription**; both the prescription and the pills can be obtained from your pharmacist in most provinces. Take the pills in 2 doses, 12 hours apart (for example: 10:00 in the morning and 10:00 at night). The timing of the second dose is very important and you should set an alarm or other reminder to remember. As the combination pills can make you vomit, you should take a medication to prevent nausea (e.g., dimenhydrinate) 30-60 minutes before each dose. The combination estrogen/progestogen pills are less effective and have more side effects than the levonorgestrel-only or ulipristal pills and are recommended only when those are not available.
- 8** After taking ECPs, your period should arrive on time (when you would normally expect it) or it might be a few days early or late. If it is **more than a week** late or if it arrives **more than 3 weeks** after you take the pills, you need to take a pregnancy test. Perform a home pregnancy test or see your health-care provider.
- 9** ECPs **do not protect** you from sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy from subsequent unprotected sex.
- 10** Common **side effects** of ECPs are changes to menstrual cycle, nausea, abdominal pain, headache and fatigue.

