



The Media Project

A Program of Advocates for Youth

Emergency Contraception (a.k.a. “The Morning After Pill”)

DEVELOPMENT

Emergency contraception (sometimes referred to by the misnomer “the morning after pill”) is a **back-up method of birth control** that is used within 72 hours **after** unprotected sex or in the event of a known contraceptive failure, such as a condom breaking. It is **not** intended to be used as a regular method of contraception. Emergency contraception is **not** abortion: in fact, emergency contraception – like regular birth control pills – is **not** effective if pregnancy has already occurred.

SETTING THE SCENE FOR EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

- The condom broke
- The diaphragm slipped
- You were forced to have sex.

DON'T WRITE THE WRONGS

- Emergency contraception is **not** the “abortion pill,” mifepristone (which is also known as RU-486).
- Emergency contraception is **not** effective if pregnancy has already occurred.
- Emergency contraception can help to **reduce the risk** of pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex.
- Experts say emergency contraception can help to **reduce** the number of abortions.

PRODUCTION

- Studies have shown that emergency contraception (EC) prevents pregnancy by inhibiting or delaying ovulation.
- EC **does not** protect against sexually transmitted diseases.
- If 100 women have unprotected sex and use EC pills immediately after, only 1 to 2 of them would become pregnant.
- Timing is everything! Emergency contraceptive pills must be taken within 72 hours (allowing for the second dose 12 hours later) of unprotected sex. An IUD used as an emergency contraceptive can be inserted up to five days after ovulation to prevent pregnancy.
- Many religious hospitals and clinics will not prescribe EC. Some national retail outlets also refuse to sell EC, even with a prescription.
- The American’s Women’s Association and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommend the dispensing of EC prescriptions during regular doctor visits, **prior** to the need for the pills.

- Women who are informed about their contraceptive choices are better prepared to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy.

SOME SEXUAL SCENARIOS

“Oh, no ... the condom broke!”

When used incorrectly or past its expiration date, condoms can become torn during sex, resulting in leakage. Emergency contraception can provide an emergency back-up after sex in this situation.

“I forgot to take my pill ... it happens, ok?”

Missed birth control pills often result in unexpected or unwanted pregnancies. Emergency contraception can help reduce the risk of an unwanted pregnancy. However, EC should not be relied upon as a regular method of birth control.

“It was my first time ... I didn’t think I could get pregnant!”

25% of teen women do not use contraception during first intercourse. As many as 900,000 teens experience a pregnancy each year, most of which are unintended. Sexually active teens are often not given equal access to family planning and are not taught pregnancy prevention in school.

“Don’t worry ... I’ll pull out.”

It only takes one time to become pregnant. Emergency contraception should not be used in place of a regular birth control method.

“I thought he was a great guy. I never expected him to force himself on me!”

85% of teen rape victims are assaulted by someone they know – 65% by an acquaintance or friend and 20% by a family member. Emergency contraception is often prescribed to avoid unwanted pregnancy for women who were forced into sex without protection. The dispensing of the pills can also provide opportunity for counseling and STD testing.

THE WRAP

There are two products on the market today that are explicitly approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use as emergency contraceptives – Preven and Plan B. Certain brands of oral contraceptives (and an IUD) can also act as emergency contraceptives. All available methods currently require a physician’s prescription. In Washington state and California, women are able to receive emergency contraception directly from pharmacists through collaborative practice agreements with doctors. Other states, including Alaska and Oregon have such legislation pending.

In 1997, the FDA declared emergency contraception to be safe and effective in preventing unintended pregnancy, yet public awareness – and use – for this important medical method remains limited among women of reproductive age.

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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