

**ABCD Family Planning**  
**Fact Sheet**  
**Emergency Contraception (EC)**

**What is emergency contraception (EC)?**

- You use EC up to 5 days after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy. This method of birth control is reversible (not permanent).
- The most effective form of EC is the Copper T IUD. It is inserted into the uterus and can prevent pregnancy for up to 10 years.
- Emergency contraceptive pills (EC pills) use hormones to prevent pregnancy.

**How does EC work?**

- The IUD used as EC prevents sperm from reaching the egg, and *sometimes may* prevent a fertilized egg from attaching inside the uterus.
- EC pills work by stopping or delaying ovulation (the release of an egg from a woman's ovary).

**How well does EC work to prevent pregnancy?**

EC works very well to prevent pregnancy. How well EC works depends on the type you use, and how much time has passed since you had unprotected sex. How much you weigh might also affect how well certain EC pills work. Use all forms of EC no later than 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex. The sooner you use EC the better it works to prevent pregnancy.

**What types of EC are there?**

- The Copper T IUD works the best to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex (99.9%).
- There are three types of EC pills:
  1. The EC pill called *ella*<sup>TM</sup> works better than other pills if you are taking EC pills between 4-5 days after unprotected intercourse. *ella*<sup>TM</sup> may work better than other EC pills if you weigh more than 165 pounds.
  2. *Plan B*<sup>®</sup> *One-Step*, *Next Choice* and other EC pills contain a hormone found in some birth control pills. They work well in the first 3 days after unprotected sex. Between 4-5 days they still work, but not as well as *ella*<sup>TM</sup>.
    - Some studies show that EC pills such as *Plan B One Step*, *Next Choice*, and others may be less effective for women who weigh more than 165 pounds.
    - Until more research is done, *ella*<sup>TM</sup> or the copper T IUD may be better options for women who weigh more than 165 pounds.
    - However, if these options are not available within 5 days after unprotected intercourse, or you choose not to use one of these, it is still better to use EC pills such as *Plan B*<sup>®</sup> *One-Step* and *Next Choice* than to use no EC at all.
  3. High doses of regular birth control pills can be used as EC pills. Your health care provider can tell you how many pills to take at the same time. Then you have to take that same number of pills again in 12 hours. They are only effective in the first three days after unprotected sex. They are not as effective as the other types of EC pills.

**What do women like about EC?**

- EC is effective, reversible (not permanent), and private (no one but you needs to know).
- EC gives you another chance to prevent pregnancy if you have unprotected sex for any reason.
- The Copper T IUD is the most effective type of EC. It can also prevent pregnancy for up to 10 years.

To decrease your risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), use a latex condom every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

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- EC pills called *Plan B*® *One-Step*, *Next Choice* and birth control pills used as EC will not harm or stop a pregnancy if you are already pregnant when you take them.
- EC pills called *Plan B*® *One-Step* and *Next Choice* can be bought in a pharmacy without a prescription by women or men of any age.

### What do women not like about EC?

- EC **does not** protect you from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- EC pills do not work if you have unprotected sex after taking the pills.
- The EC pill called *ella*™ should not be used if there is a chance you are already pregnant.
- The EC pill called *ella*™ requires a prescription from a health care provider for women of all ages.
- The EC pill called *Plan B*® *One-Step* or *Next Choice* may not work as well as other options if you weigh over 165 pounds.

### What are the possible side effects of taking EC pills?

- Nausea or vomiting
- Breast pain or breast tenderness
- Feeling tired
- Headache
- Feeling dizzy
- Early or late menstrual period
- Spotting before your period

### Remember!!

- ✓ The sooner you use EC after unprotected sex, the better it works.
- ✓ If you use the IUD for EC, you will continue to be protected from pregnancy for up to 10 years.
- ✓ But you can get pregnant if you have unprotected sex after taking EC pills.
- ✓ EC pills do not work as well to prevent pregnancy as many other types of birth control you can use before or during sex.
- ✓ If you use EC pills, talk with your health care provider about methods of birth control that you can start right away.
- ✓ Use condoms if you do not start another birth control method right away,
- ✓ Your next period may be a few days early or late. See your health care provider for a pregnancy test if you do not get your period by 3 weeks after using EC pills, or if you think you might be pregnant.
- ✓ EC pills may not prevent an ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside of the uterus), which is a medical emergency. Call your health center right away if you feel pain in your lower stomach.

### Return to the health center as soon as possible if you need birth control or if you:

- Have not had your period by 3 weeks after taking EC
- Think you might be pregnant
- Have pain in your lower stomach
- Think you might have a sexually transmitted disease

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