



# Emergency Contraception

(Aka “the Morning-After Pill”)

## What Is Emergency Contraception (EC)?

Emergency Contraception is used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse, when a contraceptive method has failed, or when it was not used correctly.

**An individual (with a vagina, ovaries, uterus, etc.) is at risk for pregnancy if...**

- They have had intercourse and did not use any form of contraception.
  - The condom broke, slipped or leaked.
  - Their diaphragm /sponge dislodged, was torn, or removed too early.
- They missed two or more birth control pills and/or delayed starting a new pack and had unprotected sex.
  - They use a natural family method and miscalculated their fertile period.
- If their partner (with a penis) “pulled out” before ejaculation, and a condom was not used.
  - They were late for their birth control shot (Depo Provera) and had unprotected sex.
- They were more than one day late starting their new birth control ring cycle or birth control patch cycle and had unprotected sex.
  - They were forced against their will to have sex and was not using reliable birth control.
- They were drunk or high and are not sure whether they had sex and/or if they used any form of birth control.

## What EC Exists?

*There are two types of EC:*

1. Emergency Contraception Pills (ECP) are commonly referred to as the “morning after pill,” which can work for up to 3 to 5 days (72 – 120 hours) after unprotected intercourse. **The sooner the ECP is taken, the more effective they will be at preventing pregnancy.**
2. A copper IUD (intrauterine device) can be inserted into the uterus up to 7 days after unprotected sex.

Please note that the IUD can be used for EC as well as for birth control under “normal” circumstances. After using it for EC, it can be left and used as a long-term contraceptive. To use the IUD as a method of

EC, a physician's appointment would need to be made a.s.a.p. Furthermore, it is a rare method of EC.

## **What Is ECP?**

ECP contains the same hormones as birth control pills, but with higher doses. Currently, there are two forms of ECP, Plan B™ and the Yuzpe method. Plan B™ is the only government approved form of ECP sold in Canada. An individual is now able to purchase Plan B™ directly from a local pharmacist **without** a prescription. Plan B™ contains only one hormone, progesterin, and has fewer side effects. Also, it is more effective than other forms of ECP.

The Yuzpe method involves high doses of combination birth control pills which contain the hormones estrogen and progesterin. The most common brand used today is Ovral™ and is prescribed by a health care provider in several doses.

**ECP is for emergency use only**, which means that an individual will have to choose a regular form of birth control after using ECP for protection against pregnancy. If they have sex after taking ECP and are not using a form of birth control, they are at risk for pregnancy. **Also, ECP and birth control do not protect against sexually transmitted infections.**

*ECP is not the same as the abortion pill also known as RU-486. ECP prevents pregnancy from occurring up to 3 days after unprotected intercourse. If the individual is already pregnant and takes ECP, it will not cause a miscarriage or abortion.*

## **How Does ECP work?**

Depending on when ECP is used, it can prevent pregnancy in three ways:

- 1. If the ovaries have not released a monthly egg (ovulation), ECP delays ovulation. An egg and sperm will not unite and so pregnancy is prevented.**
- 2. ECP may prevent the egg and sperm coming together (fertilization).**
- 3. The lining of the uterus will be altered, making it difficult for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus. Pregnancy does not occur until the fertilized egg attaches to the uterus.**

## **How Do I Take ECP?**

If taking Plan B™, there are either one or two white pills in the package. Take one pill as soon as possible and the other pill exactly 12 hours later. Follow the directions on the box exactly.

For the Yuzpe method, individuals would take 4 ECP pills immediately, and 4 more pills 12 hours later as the second dose.

## **How Effective is ECP?**

The sooner an individual with a uterus takes ECP after unprotected sex, the more effective the pills will be in preventing pregnancy. The effectiveness depends on when an individual takes ECP after unprotected sex, where they are in their menstrual cycle and what type of ECP they take. For example, if

an individual (with a uterus) follows proper instructions for Plan B™, it will be on average 95% effective within 24 hours, 85% effective within 25 and 48 hours, and 58% effective between 49 and 72 hours. Therefore, effectiveness decreases the longer an individual waits. **Don't delay!**

### **What Are Possible Side Effects of ECP?**

ECP has been used worldwide for decades, and most individuals can use ECP safely. There are no long-term or serious side effects from using ECP. Some may experience nausea and vomiting when taking ECP. Therefore, an individual can eat or take an anti-nausea tablet like Gravol (“dimenhydrinate”) an hour before taking ECP. If vomiting occurs after one or more hours after taking ECP, it will have already passed through the stomach therefore will still be effective. **If vomiting within the first hour of taking ECP, another dose will be required.**

Other symptoms such as fatigue, headache, dizziness, breast tenderness and bleeding, may be experienced.

Please note that there are fewer side effects with Plan B™ than the Yuzpe method.

### **Will Using ECP Interfere with My Period?**

After taking ECP, an individual's period may come a little early or a little later than usual, and it may be heavier or lighter than normal. If the individual has not started their period within three to four weeks, they should get a pregnancy test and talk to their health care provider.

### **Can I Keep Taking My Regular Birth Control Pills?**

If an individual has taken ECP because of missed birth control pills, they should discard any missed pills and the pill for the day of treatment and continue to take their regular BC pills as usual. Also, another method of birth control (i.e. condoms) should be used for the next seven pills. If those seven days run over the end of the pack, the individual should continue with the next pack of pills and miss out the one-week break or placebo pills.

Remember: Only condoms and abstinence protect from Sexually Transmitted Infections!

We have ECP available at our Centre with a prescription from one of our health care providers. Please call for appointments. We ask for a \$5 donation for ECP. Also, we have a list of pharmacies that supply Plan B™.

If you have more questions about EC or would like to see a health care provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

## **Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!**

### **Location:**

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

**Hours:**

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm  
Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm  
Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm  
Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm  
Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

**Phone:**

709-579-1009  
Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS  
(1-877-666-9847)

**Website:**

[www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com](http://www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com)

**Email:**

[pp.nlshc@gmail.com](mailto:pp.nlshc@gmail.com)

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