

Emergency Contraception

General Information

Emergency contraception pills can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. This type of contraception is also called postcoital or “morning-after” contraception.

The pills contain a synthetic hormone (progesterone) that acts like the natural progesterone your body produces. The pills are given in two doses.

The pills reduce the risk of pregnancy by 89 percent. One out of 100 women will become pregnant after taking the pills within 3 days of unprotected sex.

Emergency contraception offers no protection against sexually transmitted diseases. If there is the possibility that unprotected sex puts you at risk, you may want to consider being tested for sexually transmitted diseases.

The pills will not harm a fetus. If you are pregnant, you do not need to use emergency contraception.

Emergency contraception is meant for emergencies only. It is not effective as a regular method of birth control. The pills do not continue to prevent pregnancy during the rest of your cycle. To prevent pregnancy, you must use other methods of birth control (such as condoms).

When to Take the Pills

- Take the first pill within 72 hours (3 days) after having unprotected sex.
- Take the next pill 12 hours after taking the first dose.

The sooner you start taking the pills after unprotected sex, the better they work.

After You Take the Pills

- Your next period may be earlier or later than normal, but it usually starts at the expected time.
- Your period flow may be heavier, lighter or more spotty than usual.
- If you see other health care providers before you get your period, remember to tell them that you have taken emergency contraception pills.
- **Schedule a follow-up visit with your health care provider if you do not have your period in 3 weeks.**
- Be sure to use another method of contraception (such as condoms) if you have sex anytime before you get your period.

Side Effects

- You may feel sick to your stomach or vomit for about 1 day. If you are nauseated after taking either dose, you may take Dramamine® or Benadryl®. If you vomit after either dose, call the Emergency Department for instructions.
- You may have a headache for about 1 day.
- Your period may come a little early or late after taking the pills.