

# Emergency Contraception FAQ's

## 15 common questions your patients are likely to ask...

### 1. What is an Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)?

An emergency contraceptive pill (also known as "the morning after pill") is recommended for the prevention of pregnancy within 72 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse.

It contains levonorgestrel which is a progestogen – a substance that is also found in certain birth-control pills and mini-pills. The earlier the pill is taken after unprotected sexual intercourse, the more effective it is.

### 2. How is our ECP taken?

The treatment consists of a SINGLE dose of two tablets containing 0,75 milligrams of levonorgestrel. The tablets must be taken as a single dose together as soon as possible, but not later than, 72 hours (three days) after having unprotected sexual intercourse.

### 3. How does the ECP work?

Depending on when you use the ECP during your monthly cycle, the pills will either stop the release of an egg or prevent fertilisation of an egg.

### 4. When can I use the ECP?

It is indicated following any unprotected act of sexual intercourse, including:

- when no contraceptive has been used
- when a contraceptive method may have failed, including:
  - \* Condom rupture, slippage or misuse
  - \* Diaphragm or cap dislodgement, breakage or early removal
  - \* Failed coitus interruptus
  - \* Miscalculation of periodic abstinence method
  - \* IUD expulsion
  - \* Missed regular oral contraceptive pills for four or more days in the cycle

### 5. Does emergency contraception cause an abortion?

No, using emergency contraceptive pills (also called "morning after pills" or "day after pills") prevents pregnancy after sex. It does not cause an abortion.

The way emergency contraceptive pills work depends on where you are in your monthly cycle when you take them. EC works primarily, or perhaps exclusively, by delaying or inhibiting ovulation (release of your egg).

### 6. Are there any Side Effects of using an ECP?

Side effects of the emergency contraceptive pills typically last only a few days and may include:

- Nausea or vomiting.
- Dizziness.
- Fatigue.
- Headache.
- Breast tenderness.
- Bleeding between periods or heavier menstrual bleeding.

### 7. Can I use the ECP for regular for Birth Control?

No. It's only good for that one instance of unprotected sexual intercourse. In other words, if you take it and have unprotected sexual intercourse again soon after taking it, the ECP may not protect you against pregnancy from this later incidence. The ECP is highly effective if taken properly. It shouldn't be used as a routine method of birth control.

### 8. What happens if you take the ECP while pregnant?

The ECP will not work if you're already pregnant. It is an emergency contraception which helps prevent pregnancy. Pregnancy should be excluded before you take any ECP.

### 9. Can I use emergency contraceptive pills if I am breastfeeding?

Small amounts of levonorgestrel may appear in breast milk. While not considered harmful, to reduce the amount that the baby might ingest, you can express milk immediately before taking the ECP or delay taking the medicine until immediately after feeding your baby. This approach must be weighed against the need to minimise delays in treatment.

### 10. Is the emergency contraceptive pill effective?

Efficacy is higher when emergency contraception is used within 72 hours after unprotected intercourse.

### 11. What to do if I vomit after taking the pill?

After taking the emergency contraceptive pill, a few women may be sick (vomit). If you vomit within 2 hours of taking the ECP, you need to take another dose. So, go back to your pharmacist, doctor or family planning clinic for another box.

### 12. When, after taking an ECP, do you need to see your doctor?

- If your period is more than 5 days late, or unusually heavy or light.
- If you are still worried that you are pregnant.
- If you have sudden or unusual pain in the lower abdomen and your period is late.
- If you have any concerns about your health or about the methods of contraception that is most suitable for you.

### 13. Can the ECP make you infertile?

No, you have nothing to fear. Taking the morning after pill (a.k.a. emergency contraception) will not make you less fertile in the long run. Emergency contraception prevents pregnancy after one act of unprotected sexual intercourse.

### 14. When, after taking an ECP, should a pregnancy test be performed?

To be on the safe side, a pregnancy test should be performed three to four weeks after taking the ECP. A pregnancy test should definitely be performed if menstruation starts on time but appears abnormal – or if menstruation is more than five days delayed.

### 15. Do I need a prescription for an ECP?

No prescription is needed for an ECP. You can buy it at the pharmacy (chemist). It's available without a prescription from most pharmacies and clinics. A pharmacist may not sell an ECP to you if you are under age unless you are accompanied by either a parent or legal guardian.