
Contraception - emergency contraception

Summary

- Emergency contraception can prevent an unintended pregnancy after having unprotected sex.
 - The copper IUD is the most effective method of emergency contraception and can be used as very effective ongoing contraception for up to 10 years.
 - The copper IUD can be inserted up to five days after unprotected sex.
 - There are two types of emergency contraception pills – levonorgestrel and ulipristal acetate (sold as EllaOne™). Both are available without a prescription.
 - Emergency contraception pills are around 85 per cent effective in preventing an unintended pregnancy. Ulipristal acetate is more effective than levonorgestrel.
 - The emergency contraceptive pill should be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex.
 - Levonorgestrel is intended to be taken up to four days after unprotected sex.
 - Ulipristal acetate is intended to be taken up to five days after unprotected sex.
 - Condoms give the best available protection against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).
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What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is used to prevent pregnancy if you had sex with no contraceptive protection – for example if the condom broke, you had missed or were late in taking your pill, or if you used no contraception at all.

You can choose the **copper IUD** or an emergency contraceptive pill (sometimes called the ‘morning after pill’) for emergency contraception.

The copper IUD can be inserted by specially trained doctors or nurses.

The emergency contraceptive pill is available in two types:

- ulipristal acetate (sold as EllaOne®), which can be taken within five days after unprotected sex
- levonorgestrel (multiple brands), which is intended to be taken within four days after unprotected sex .

The emergency contraceptive pill is not recommended for ongoing contraception.

Using emergency contraception is not an abortion.

How effective is emergency contraception?

The copper IUD is more than 99 per cent effective at preventing pregnancy.

Emergency contraceptive pills work approximately 85 per cent of the time in preventing pregnancy. The ulipristal acetate emergency contraceptive pill is more effective at preventing pregnancy than the levonorgestrel emergency contraceptive pill, and either type is more effective the sooner it is taken.

Emergency contraception does not protect you from sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

What stops emergency contraception from working?

The copper IUD may not work if it is inserted later than five days after unprotected sex.

Emergency contraceptive pills may be less effective if you:

- are late taking them
 - vomit within three hours of taking them
 - weigh over 70 kg or have a body mass index more than 26 kg/m²
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- are taking certain medications (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

How do I use emergency contraception?

The copper IUD must be inserted within 120 hours (5 days) of unprotected sex.

The emergency contraceptive pill should be **taken as soon as possible** after unprotected sex. The emergency contraceptive pill can be taken up to four or five days after unprotected sex, depending on the type of pill you take. Speak to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist for further information.

How does emergency contraception work?

The copper IUD works by making it difficult for a fertilised egg to stick to the lining of the womb to start a pregnancy.

The emergency contraceptive pill prevents or delays the ovaries releasing an egg. If you have unprotected sex again you may need another dose.

Where can I get emergency contraception?

Talk to your GP or nurse about a copper IUD. You need an appointment for it to be inserted.

You can buy emergency contraceptive pills at a pharmacy without a prescription. The pharmacist will recommend the best type of emergency contraception pill depending on:

- your weight and body mass index
- whether you are taking certain types of medication, including other contraceptives, or
- whether you are breast feeding.

Be sure to ask the pharmacist about whether the emergency contraceptive pill is a suitable option for you.

How much does emergency contraception cost?

The cost of emergency contraceptive pills or a copper IUD is not covered by a Health Care Card.

The emergency contraception pill costs between \$15 and \$50 depending on the type and brand.

The copper IUD may cost around \$70–120 outside a public hospital setting.

Are there any side effects from using emergency contraception?

After a copper IUD has been put in, you may have a few weeks of irregular bleeding between periods. After this time, your periods may be heavier and more painful. As it does not contain hormones, there are no hormonal side effects from using the copper IUD.

Emergency contraceptive pills can change the amount of bleeding for your next period. They may also make your period late or earlier, or it may come as you normally expect. If your period is more than seven days late, lighter than usual or unusual in any other way, take a pregnancy test as soon as you can.

Other possible effects for a small number of users can include:

- nausea
- headaches
- bloating
- sore or tender breasts.

Can emergency contraception cause any serious health problems?

There is a small risk of infection at the time the copper IUD is put in and for the first three weeks after it has been inserted. There is also a small risk of perforation, which is when the IUD makes a hole in the wall of the uterus when it is put in.

There are no known serious risks from taking emergency contraceptive pills. However, the pharmacist will recommend the best type of emergency contraception pill depending on your circumstances

Check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about whether the emergency contraceptive pill is a suitable option

for you.

Can women of any weight use emergency contraception ?

A double dose of levonorgestrel emergency contraception pill is recommended for women who weigh more than 70 kg or have a body mass index greater than 26 kg/m². The recommended dose of ulipristal acetate is unchanged

The copper IUD is a very effective method of emergency contraception for all women, regardless of their weight.

When can I start another method of contraception after using emergency contraception?

The copper IUD can remain in place and will provide very effective ongoing contraception for up to 10 years.

The pill, implant, vaginal ring and injection can be started immediately after taking the levonorgestrel emergency contraceptive pill.

These methods of contraception can make ulipristal acetate less effective at preventing pregnancy, therefore they cannot be started until five days after taking ulipristal acetate emergency contraception.

If you start these methods within three weeks of taking ulipristal acetate you will need to have a pregnancy test in three to four weeks' time.

What happens if I get pregnant while I'm using emergency contraception?

If you find that you are pregnant while using a copper IUD, see a doctor or nurse to have the IUD removed immediately. The doctor or nurse will also need to rule out a pregnancy in your fallopian tubes.

If the copper IUD is removed there is no harm to the pregnancy and you can continue or have an abortion. If it cannot be removed and you continue with the pregnancy there is a high risk of losing the pregnancy or a premature delivery

If you find that you are pregnant after having taken an emergency contraceptive pill, it is safe to continue the pregnancy or to have an abortion.

Can I use emergency contraception after I've had a baby?

The copper IUD can be inserted any time once the baby is four weeks old. In some circumstances it can be inserted soon after giving birth. Your doctor will advise you on the best timing for you.

Emergency contraceptive pills are safe to take at any stage after having a baby.

What if I am breast feeding?

The copper IUD will not affect your breast milk.

The levonorgestrel emergency contraceptive pill is safe to take at any time after having a baby. It will not affect your breast milk.

The ulipristal acetate emergency contraceptive pill is safe to take at any time after having a baby, but it can affect your breast milk. You will need to express and throw out breast milk for seven days after taking it.

Where to get help

- **1800 my options** can provide information on emergency contraception and services that can offer IUD insertion
- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Pharmacist**
- Many community health services and some public hospitals will have a family planning clinic, a sexual health clinic or a women's health clinic
- **Family Planning Victoria** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages Tel. **1800 013 952** or **(03) 9257 0100**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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