

Emergency contraceptive pill (“morning after pill”)

The emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) can be taken to reduce the chance of getting pregnant after having unprotected sex, either because contraception wasn't used or if contraception has failed, such as a broken condom or if you forgot to take the Pill. The emergency contraceptive pill is often called the “morning after pill”. There are two different types of ECP which can be bought from most pharmacies in Australia without a doctor's prescription.

How does it work?

The ECP may stop a pregnancy before it starts by stopping or delaying the release of an egg from the ovaries. The ECP does not prevent fertilisation (sperm meeting an egg), inhibit implantation or end a pregnancy that has already started. It is not an abortion pill. It also doesn't provide any on-going contraception and offers no protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

How do I take it?

The original ECP is approved for use up to 72 hours (3 days) after unprotected sex. A newer ECP is effective for up to 120 hours (5 days) but the earlier it is taken the greater the chance that you will not become pregnant.

How effective is it?

Emergency contraception does not prevent all pregnancies. Just how effective the emergency contraceptive pill is at preventing pregnancy is complicated and depends on when unprotected sex happened and at what stage of your menstrual cycle you are.

There are differences in effectiveness of the two types of ECP. Your pharmacist or healthcare professional can discuss your options with you.

Who should not take it?

There are very few people who cannot take the ECP. Your pharmacist or doctor will ask you some questions to make sure ECP is right for you.

What are the side effects?

Mild, short-term side effects may include headache, nausea, abdominal pain, dizziness and changes to your bleeding pattern.

If you vomit within 2 to 3 hours of taking the tablet, you will need to take another tablet.

If successful in preventing pregnancy, most people will have a normal period at the normal time, though it may come early or a little late.

What should I do next?

Instructions for starting or restarting hormonal contraception, such as the Pill, after ECP differ between the two types. After taking the newer ECP it is recommended to delay restarting regular hormonal contraception for 5 days. Your pharmacist or healthcare professional will discuss this with you.

It's a good idea to make an appointment with your doctor or us (on 1300 003 707) within 2-3 weeks to assess whether the ECP has prevented pregnancy and to discuss a reliable method of contraception. If you do not get your period

within 3 weeks of taking ECP you must see a doctor as you may be pregnant.

What if I become pregnant?

There is no evidence that the ECP will harm development of the fetus if you decide to continue with the pregnancy.

How often can I use the emergency contraceptive pill?

Although there is no limit to the number of times you can take the ECP, you should only use

this in emergencies and not as a regular method of contraception. It doesn't prevent pregnancy as effectively as other contraceptive methods.

Where can I get it?

You can get the ECP from pharmacies without a prescription. Your pharmacist will need to ask a few simple questions before you can receive it.

If you are using one of the less reliable methods of contraception, such as condoms, you may consider asking your doctor for an advance supply "just in case".



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