



# emergency contraception



Emergency contraception is a safe, effective and responsible method of preventing pregnancy when regular contraception has failed, no contraception was used and/or in the case of sexual assault. If you act quickly, emergency contraception will usually prevent pregnancy.

Emergency contraception will not prevent you from getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Most STIs are treatable but they often do not have symptoms. If you have had unprotected sex, you should arrange to have an STI screening.

Emergency contraception is also known as post-coital contraception. It is available in two forms:

- » Emergency contraceptive pill (ECP)  
– progesterone and ulipristal
- » Insertion of an intrauterine copper device (IUCD)

## WHERE TO GET EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

The ECP is available directly from pharmacies without a prescription, or from a doctor or family planning clinic.

The IUCD can be fitted by a trained doctor.

## METHOD 1: PROGESTERONE EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVE PILL

— MAINLY NORLEVO AND PREVENELLE

The most common brands of the progesterone ECP in Ireland are Norlevo and Prevenelle. This pill is available from pharmacies without a prescription or from a doctor or family planning clinic. It must be taken within 72 hours (3 days) of unprotected sex but is most effective the sooner it is taken.

## METHOD 2: ULIPRISTAL EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVE PILL

— ELLAONE

The main brand of the ulipristal ECP in Ireland is ellaOne. This pill is available from pharmacies without a prescription or from a doctor or family planning clinic. It must be taken within 120 hours (5 days) of unprotected sex but is most effective the sooner it is taken. Evidence to date supports the ulipristal ECP as being more effective than the progesterone ECP.

Both methods of the ECP are available on a medical card but only on prescription from a doctor. Both methods of the ECP work by preventing or delaying ovulation, thereby preventing fertilisation.



### TAKING THE EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVE PILL

- » Take the ECP as soon as possible after unprotected sex.
- » Inform the doctor or pharmacist if you are on any other medication. A small number of medications may reduce the effectiveness of the ECP and you may need a different dosage or an IUCD (see Method 3: Copper Intrauterine Device).
- » If you vomit within 3 hours of taking the ECP, return to the doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible for a second dose or other advice.
- » Taking different kinds of the ECP during the same cycle is not recommended as they work in different ways. If you need a second dosage during your cycle, you must use the same ECP as your first dosage.
- » Use other methods of contraception after taking the ECP as it does not provide contraception for the remainder of your cycle. In fact if ovulation is only delayed, you could well be fertile in the following weeks.
- » Be aware that there is a small risk of failure and you may still become pregnant.
- » The ECP does not work if you are already pregnant.

### AFTER TAKING THE ECP, GO TO A DOCTOR/FAMILY PLANNING CLINIC IF:

- » Your next period is more than 5 days late
- » Your next period is unusually light or heavy
- » You experience severe lower abdominal pain

### SIDE EFFECTS OF TAKING THE ECP

There are no long-term effects from using the ECP. However, some women may feel sick, dizzy or tired, or may get headaches, breast tenderness, diarrhoea or lower abdominal pain. These symptoms should improve within a few days. You may have some bleeding before your next period is due or your period may come early or up to one week late. A very small number of women will vomit (see Taking the Emergency Contraceptive Pill).

There is no evidence to show that taking the ECP will affect your future fertility or that repeated use makes it less effective or causes harmful effects to your body.

### METHOD 3: COPPER INTRAUTERINE DEVICE (IUCD)

An IUCD, also known as a copper coil, works as a method of emergency contraception as it may stop an egg being fertilised or implanted in your uterus (womb).

A trained doctor fits an IUCD in your uterus up to 5 days after you have had unprotected sex. If you need to return to have the IUCD fitted, you may be advised to take the ECP in the meantime.

An IUCD is the most effective method of emergency contraception available. It will prevent more than 9 out of 10 (99%) pregnancies expected to occur if no emergency contraception was used. It can also provide ongoing contraception if you wish to use this method. In a small number of cases, it may not be possible to fit an IUCD.

While an IUCD can be fitted up to 5 days after unprotected sex, it is not as widely available as the ECP and takes time to be fitted. You should therefore make an appointment as soon as possible.

### AN IUCD MAY BE SUITABLE IF YOU:

- » Want to use the most effective method of emergency contraception
- » Do not want, or cannot, take hormones
- » Wish to use the IUCD as an ongoing method of contraception
- » For more information see our IUCD Contraception Factsheet

### REMEMBER

- » Emergency contraception works by preventing pregnancy, it does not cause an abortion
- » Emergency contraception is more effective the sooner it is taken
- » Emergency contraception is not as effective as a regular or long-term method of contraception
- » Emergency contraception does not prevent you from getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)

This factsheet is based on evidence and medical opinion at the time of publication. However you may come across conflicting advice on certain points. Ring or visit your pharmacist, doctor or family planning clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.

#### Contact:

**IFPA Dublin City Centre Clinic**  
5/7 Cathal Brugha Street  
Dublin 1  
Tel: 01 872 7088 / 874 2110

**IFPA Tallaght Clinic**  
Level 3, The Square, Tallaght  
Dublin 24  
Tel: 01 459 7685 / 459 7686

**IFPA National Pregnancy Helpline**  
1850 49 50 51  
Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm  
www.ifpa.ie

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