

## What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency Contraception (EC) can be used AFTER unprotected vaginal intercourse (sex without effective birth control) to reduce the chances of an unintended pregnancy. EC pills (also known as "the morning-after pill") are moderately effective, whereas the copper intrauterine device (IUD) is the most effective form of EC.

Some examples of unprotected vaginal intercourse (when EC can be used) are:

- When contraception has failed (e.g. condom slipped off or broke, birth control pills were missed)
- When ejaculation has occurred inside the vagina (e.g. while using the withdrawal method)
- When intercourse occurred without using a reliable birth control method
- In instances of sexual assault.

Consider buying EC pills ahead of time to have "on hand".

## What methods of Emergency Contraception are available?

There are four methods of EC available, described below:

Method	Copper IUD (e.g. Flexi T, Liberté, Mona Lisa, Nova T, SMB)	Ulipristal Acetate Pill (Ella)	Progestin Pill (e.g. Plan B, Contingency One, Next Choice, Option 2, NorLevo)	Yuzpe Method (combined hormonal birth control pills)
Order of Effectiveness	<p><b>Most effective</b></p> <p>99% effective at preventing pregnancy if inserted up to seven days after unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p>	<p><b>Moderately effective</b></p> <p>Reduces the chance of pregnancy by ~ 60% when taken up to 120 hours after a single act of unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p>	<p><b>Moderately effective</b></p> <p>~ 50 % reduced chance of pregnancy if taken up to 72 hours after unprotected vaginal intercourse. Has decreasing effectiveness over time, but may be taken up to 120 hours after unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p>	<p><b>Least effective</b></p> <p>~ 40% of pregnancies prevented if taken up to 72 hours after unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p>
What is it?	<p>A small "T" shaped device that is inserted into the uterus by a health care provider in a clinic. Can be inserted up to seven days after unprotected vaginal intercourse (see above).</p>	<p>A pill that can be taken by mouth up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected vaginal intercourse (see above).</p>	<p>A progestin-only pill that can be taken by mouth up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected vaginal intercourse (see above).</p>	<p>A very specific dose of birth control pills that contain the progestin levonorgestrel (see "How do I Use It?").</p>

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	Copper IUD	Ulipristal Acetate Pill	Progestin Pill	Yuzpe Method
How does it work?	<p>Copper ions are believed to prevent fertilization and implantation.</p> <p>If a copper IUD is inserted before ovulation, it prevents fertilization (the copper inactivates sperm).</p> <p>If it is inserted after ovulation, the copper IUD prevents implantation.</p>	<p>Ulipristal EC delays the release of an egg (ovum) when taken before ovulation.</p> <p>If a person is already pregnant, taking EC pills will not end the pregnancy.</p>	<p>Levonorgestrel EC delays the release of an egg (ovum) if taken up to eight hours before ovulation.</p> <p>If a person is already pregnant, taking EC pills will not end the pregnancy.</p>	<p>Same as other EC pills, though less effective and requires two doses. Usually requires medication to prevent vomiting.</p> <p>If a person is already pregnant, taking EC pills will not end the pregnancy.</p>
How do I use it?	<p>A trained healthcare provider inserts the IUD into the uterus (see “How can I access it?”).</p> <p>A copper IUD is also a highly effective form of ongoing birth control.</p> <p>For more information on IUDs see the IUD fact sheet.</p>	<p>Ulipristal acetate EC is one 30 milligram pill that should be taken within 120 hours of unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p> <p>Since there is not a reliable way to tell when a person has ovulated, ulipristal EC can be taken any time in a person’s cycle.</p> <p>A person’s period should start within three weeks of taking EC pills. Take a pregnancy test if menstrual bleeding does not occur.</p>	<p>Levonorgestrel EC is 1.5 milligrams (packaged as one or two pills) that should be taken as one dose <b>as soon as possible</b> after unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p> <p>Best if taken up to 72 hours following unprotected sex. May be taken up to five days following unprotected intercourse, but with reduced chances it will prevent pregnancy.</p> <p>If vomiting occurs within two hours of taking levonorgestrel EC, consider repeating the dose.</p> <p>Since there is not a reliable way to tell when a person has ovulated, can be taken any time in a person’s cycle.</p> <p>A person’s period should start within three weeks of taking EC pills. Take a pregnancy test if menstrual bleeding does not occur.</p>	<p>Combined hormonal birth control pills containing estrogen and the progestin called levonorgestrel can be taken in two doses, 12 hours apart.</p> <p>Minovral and equivalent generics: Take four pills within 72 hours after unprotected sex and take four more pills 12 hours later.</p> <p>Alesse and equivalent generics: Take five pills within 72 hours after unprotected sex and take five more pills 12 hours later.</p> <p>Taking dimenhydrinate (e.g. Gravol) may be necessary to prevent nausea and vomiting.</p> <p>If vomiting occurs within two hours of taking either dose, consider repeating the dose.</p>
Advantages	<p>Can be left in place for ongoing contraception for five to ten years, depending on the type of IUD.</p> <p>IUDs are an excellent long-term contraceptive choice for people of <u>all</u> ages.</p> <p>Fertility returns immediately after removal of the IUD (which is a quick and easy office procedure).</p>	<p>Slightly more effective than the levonorgestrel (progestin) EC pill.</p> <p>Ulipristal is equally effective up to 120 hours following unprotected vaginal intercourse.</p>	<p>Available without a prescription.</p> <p>Can be purchased in advance to have “on hand” in case of need.</p> <p>Hormonal contraception can be started immediately after taking levonorgestrel EC, with back-up contraception for the first seven days.</p>	<p>May be readily on hand for some people. Different brands of birth control pills containing levonorgestrel may be used (see above).</p>

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	Copper IUD	Ulipristal Acetate Pill	Progestin Pill	Yuzpe Method
Disadvantages	<p>Requires a visit to a health care provider for insertion.</p> <p>Arranging an insertion appointment within a week following unprotected intercourse may be challenging (<a href="http://www.emergencyiud.com">www.emergencyiud.com</a> may be able to help).</p> <p>Cost may be a barrier for some.</p> <p>Side effects may include menstrual cramping or increased menstrual flow. Other side effects are rare, and will be reviewed by the health care provider who is trained to insert IUDs.</p> <p>Does not protect against STIs.</p>	<p>Only offers protection following a single contraceptive emergency – i.e. one unprotected vaginal intercourse event.</p> <p>Because it works by delaying ovulation, there is an increased chance of getting pregnant if a person has unprotected intercourse again AFTER taking ulipristal EC and before the next period.</p> <p>Does not work if ovulation has already occurred.</p> <p>Requires a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner.</p> <p>Cost may be a barrier for some.</p> <p>Hormonal contraception cannot be started until five days after using ulipristal acetate for EC, and back-up contraception should be used for the first 14 days.</p> <p>Does not protect against STIs.</p> <p>May be less effective in people who weigh more than 75 kg (165 pounds).</p>	<p>Only offers protection from a single contraceptive emergency – i.e. one unprotected intercourse event.</p> <p>The effectiveness of progestin-only EC pills declines with delay in treatment.</p> <p>Because it works by delaying ovulation, there is an increased chance of getting pregnant if a person has unprotected intercourse again AFTER taking levonorgestrel EC and before the next period.</p> <p>Does not work if ovulation has already occurred.</p> <p>Does not protect against STIs.</p> <p>May be less effective in people who weigh more than 75 kg (165 pounds).</p>	<p>Only offers protection from a single contraceptive emergency.</p> <p>The effectiveness of the Yuzpe method declines with delay in treatment.</p> <p>Because it works by delaying ovulation, there is an increased chance of getting pregnant if a person has unprotected intercourse again AFTER using the Yuzpe method.</p> <p>Requires a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner.</p> <p>Does not work if ovulation has already occurred.</p> <p>Must be taken in two doses, taken 12 hours apart.</p> <p>Cannot be used by people who cannot or should not take estrogen.</p> <p>Nausea and vomiting are common side effects, and may require use of an anti-nausea medication, which in turn can cause drowsiness.</p> <p>Not as effective as other methods, and not as well tolerated as other pills that are made just for the purpose of EC.</p>
How can I access it?	<p>Can be purchased in British Columbia at Opt clinics, pharmacies, and youth clinics.</p> <p>Requires a visit to a physician or nurse practitioner who is trained to insert IUDs.</p> <p>For a list of some providers you can visit <a href="http://www.emergencyiud.com">www.emergencyiud.com</a></p>	<p>Requires a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner that is then taken to the pharmacy.</p>	<p>Levonorgestrel EC pills can be accessed at Opt clinics, pharmacies, youth clinics and Emergency Departments. Does not require a prescription, and can be purchased by either partner.</p>	<p>Requires having access to combined birth control pills that contain levonorgestrel.</p> <p>Requires having sufficient pills to achieve the required dose twice.</p>

**Do you still have questions?** Opt's 1-800-SEX-SENSE (1-800-739-7367 or 604-731-7803 in the lower mainland) is a free and confidential sexual health referral and information service, open Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (Pacific time) for people living in British Columbia and the Yukon, Canada. <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/sex-sense>