

Emergency Contraception (EC)

What is emergency contraception (EC)?

- EC are hormone pills that can help prevent pregnancy after you have unprotected sex or your birth control method fails (e.g., condom breaks).
- Progestin only EC is also known as Plan B® or NorLevo®.
- EC is for **emergency use only**. Do not use EC as a routine method of birth control as it does not give ongoing protection from pregnancy.
- EC is sometimes called the “morning after pill.” **EC is most effective if you take it as soon as possible**. You can take it up to 5 days after having unprotected sex.
- EC does not protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STI).

How does EC work?

- Depending on where you are in your menstrual cycle, EC might:
 - stop or delay the release of the egg
 - change the lining of the uterus
 - slow down the sperm
- EC does not affect a pregnancy that has already been implanted in the uterus.

How do I use EC?

- Follow the instructions on the package or talk to your pharmacist or healthcare provider.
- Your period should come at the usual time. You might have light bleeding or spotting between periods. This is **not** your period.

How well does EC work?

- EC is most effective if taken **as soon as possible**, but can be taken up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex. If EC is taken in
 - the first 24 hours, it prevents about 95 percent of possible pregnancies
 - 25–48 hours, it prevents about 85 percent of possible pregnancies
- The effectiveness of EC starts to drop to 58 percent at 72 hours but it can still be taken up to 120 hours after having unprotected sex.

Do I need a pregnancy test?

- Get a pregnancy test done if your period:
 - does not start within 3 weeks of taking EC
 - is more than 7 days later than expected
 - is much lighter than usual

What are the side effects of EC?

- You might have light bleeding or spotting for a few days after taking EC. This is not your period.
- Side effects of EC can include:
 - upset stomach
 - dizziness
 - throwing up
 - stomach cramps
 - headaches
 - feeling more tired than usual
 - sore breasts

When should I take EC?

- Think about using EC to prevent pregnancy if:
 - no birth control method was used
 - a condom broke, leaked, slipped, or fell off
 - you have been sexually assaulted
 - your method of birth control was not used correctly and you had unprotected sex in the past 5 days
 - withdrawal (pulling out) method was used
- If you use hormonal birth control (e.g., birth control pills, birth control patch, and vaginal ring) and need help deciding about EC, go to Stay on Schedule (SOS) at www.sexualityandu.ca/teens/sos.aspx.

Can anyone take EC?

- **Do not** take EC if you:
 - have a confirmed pregnancy
 - have vaginal bleeding that is not normal for you
 - have an allergy to EC
- If you are not sure if you should take EC or have any questions, talk to your pharmacist or healthcare provider.

Should I use my regular method of birth control after I take EC?

- After you take EC:
 - continue your regular method of birth control at the usual time
 - if starting a new cycle of birth control, start the day after taking EC
 - **for the next 7 days**, do not have sex or use a backup method (e.g., condoms) every time you have sex

Where do I get EC?

- You can get EC from a drugstore without a prescription (call ahead to see if your drugstore offers this service).
- You can also get EC at:
 - most family doctors
 - Sexual and Reproductive Health or Birth Control Clinics
 - most walk-in clinics
- If you have an EC pack at home, check the expiry date before you take the pills.

Sexual Decision Making

- Choose to have sex or not—you have the right to make that decision.
- Choose to protect yourself from getting pregnant and STIs.
- Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.
- Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.

For More Information

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Education/Health Promotion 403-955-6515

Clinical Services

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre	5 th floor, 1213–4 th St SW	403-955-6500
South Calgary Health Centre	31 Sunpark Plaza SE	403-943-9510
Sunridge Professional Building	406, 2675–36 th St NE	403-944-7666

Website

www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth

For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in Calgary or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll free.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.