

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Emergency contraception (EC) reduces the risk of unintended pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse (UPSI). It can also be used when contraception may have failed or been withheld, e.g., broken condom, missed pill and after sexual assault. EC is available as an oral tablet or a copper intrauterine device (IUD).

QUICK FACTS

Common names:

The morning after pill, Plan B.

Medical names:

Ulipristal (EllaOne®),
Levonorgestrel 1.5mg (multiple brands), Copper IUD.

Effectiveness:

Oral EC tablets up to 85% | Copper IUD more than 99%.

Effectiveness duration:

Oral EC tablet can be taken 4–5 days after UPSI.
Copper IUD can be inserted up to 5 days after UPSI or expected ovulation date and for ongoing contraception.

Fertility:

Oral EC: No long-term effect.
Copper IUD: Return to fertility immediately when device is removed.

Who can use it?

Oral EC: Anybody at risk of an unintended pregnancy.

Hormones:

Levonorgestrel EC contains progestogen hormone.
Ulipristal EC interacts with progesterone.
Copper IUD: Hormone free.

Visibility:

Discreet.

STIs:

No protection.

Bleeding pattern:

Oral EC: Period may be delayed or begin early.
Copper IUD: Normal cycles are expected; periods may be heavier or more painful.

Cost:

Cost depends on your individual situation.
Oral EC: Usually less than \$30 per dose.
Copper IUDs cost approx. \$80–\$150 depending on type.

Where to get it:

True clinics and GP clinics. You may also be able to access the oral EC at pharmacies without a script.



EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION DOES NOT PROTECT AGAINST STI's. TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE PROTECTED AGAINST PREGNANCY AND STIs, USE A CONDOM FOR EVERY SEXUAL ENCOUNTER.

What types are there?

There are 2 types of tablets available in Australia. Levonorgestrel EC is a 1.5mg single dose which is a progestogen hormone. It is also found in some oral contraceptive pills. It can be taken up to 4 days after UPSI to reduce the risk of a pregnancy. Ulipristal EC is another single dose tablet available and is effective for up to 5 days after UPSI. It is better to take these tablets as soon as possible after the episode of unprotected sex.

A copper IUD can also be used as emergency contraception if inserted up to 5 days after unprotected sex or within 5 days of expected time of ovulation. The copper IUD will then provide immediate ongoing contraception for 5–10 years.

How does EC work?

The oral EC works by preventing or delaying ovulation (egg release from the ovary).

The copper IUD works by interfering with sperm movement and changing the lining of the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

What are the advantages of EC in preventing pregnancy?

Oral ECs are:

- inexpensive
- easily swallowed as a once off tablet
- discreet
- safe to use while breastfeeding.

Copper IUDs are:

- highly effective as EC
- a long acting, effective method of contraception (additional benefit)
- discreet; partners may feel strings
- reversible, with a rapid return to usual fertility when removed
- suitable for people who can't take contraceptives that contain oestrogen
- relatively inexpensive over 5–10 years of use.

Who can use EC?

Oral EC: Anybody at risk of an unintended pregnancy.

Copper IUD: Most individuals can safely use an IUD.

Your health practitioner will review the suitability of the method with you prior to insertion.

In assessing your suitability, consideration is given to several important factors including:

- current menstrual and bleeding patterns
- unexplained vaginal bleeding (this should be investigated before using an IUD)
- a recent history of a sexually transmitted infection or PID
- uterine or cervical abnormalities
- any history cervical or uterine cancer.

The health practitioner will also review:

- previous pregnancies
- whether you need to have a Cervical Screening Test (CST) and other tests for infection prior to insertion
- any allergies including copper allergy.

Copper IUDs should not be used by:

- anyone who has an allergy to copper
- people with current cervical or endometrial cancer.

What happens to periods when EC is used?

Oral EC: Most people have a menstrual period within 7 days of the expected time frame. If your next period after taking EC is late or in any way unusual, it is very important to do a pregnancy test.

Copper IUD: Normal cycles are expected; periods may be heavier, longer or more painful.

What are the possible risks or side effects of EC?

Oral EC: Very safe to use with no health risks or serious side effects. Uncommon side effects include headache, dizziness, nausea and very rarely vomiting. If vomiting occurs within 2 hours of taking the EC pill a repeat dose should be taken.

Copper IUD: Normal cycles are expected; periods may be heavier, longer or more painful.

When does fertility return when you stop EC?

Both oral EC and copper IUD will not impact a person's long-term fertility. Once a copper IUD is removed usual fertility returns rapidly.

How do I use a copper IUD for EC?

A copper IUD will need to be inserted by a practitioner who is trained to do this procedure. Contact True Relationships and Reproductive Health or your GP clinic to find out more about having a copper IUD inserted for EC.

How do I take oral EC?

It comes as a single dose which may be 1 or 2 tablets. It is best to take this single dose as soon as possible after unprotected sex as after 4 - 5 days the tablets will no longer be effective in preventing a pregnancy.

Taking EC because of missed oral contraception

If you are already taking the oral contraceptive pill, keep taking it as usual. You will also need to use condoms until you have taken 7 or more hormone contraceptive pills in a row. This will ensure your contraception is working effectively again.

What if I need to use oral EC again?

It can be taken more than once (including in the same menstrual cycle). However, it does not provide ongoing contraception after it is taken. Using a reliable form of contraception is the best way to protect against unplanned pregnancies.

Do I need a pregnancy test?

It is a good idea to check for pregnancy 3-4 weeks after taking EC even if you have had bleeding that seems to be your period.

It is essential that you do have a pregnancy test if:

- your period is more than 7 days late
- your next period is lighter, heavier or in any way different from usual including unusual pain
- you have started or resumed hormonal contraception pills straight after taking the EC pill
- advised by your doctor or pharmacist to have a pregnancy test or you had a copper IUD inserted as EC
- you have used the EC pill more than once in a cycle (test 3 weeks after the last episode of UPSI).

If EC doesn't work and you find out you are pregnant, having taken the oral EC is not harmful to the pregnancy. If you have a copper IUD and find out you are pregnant, see your doctor.

Does EC cause an abortion?

No, EC methods do not cause an abortion. They prevent pregnancy and do not cause disruption to an established pregnancy.

What about other medications?

Some medications, including certain anti-epileptic medications, and some herbal preparations can reduce the effectiveness of oral EC. Check with your doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist if you are using other medications including ongoing hormonal contraception.

Do I need an STI check?

EC does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you have had sex with a new partner, have more than one partner or your partner has other partners, you may be at risk of STIs even if you have no symptoms. See your GP clinic, a sexual health clinic or your State/Territory family planning organisation for testing. The consistent use of condoms is the only form of contraception that will also reduce the risk of STIs.

Unwanted sex

If you have been sexually assaulted or feel you were pressured into having sex at any time and want to talk to someone about this, please contact your State/Territory sexual assault service or your healthcare practitioner.

Where do I buy EC?

Oral EC: Available without a prescription at pharmacists. If you are having difficulty obtaining it, contact your GP, a family planning or sexual health clinic or a hospital emergency department.

Before you can be given the EC, you will be asked a few questions to assess your risk of pregnancy and your medical history. Any personal information you share is confidential and you should be offered a private area to talk to the pharmacist. Sometimes a supply of the EC can be made available for future use. Prices may vary.

Copper IUD: Contact True clinics or your GP to find out more about having a copper IUD inserted for EC.