

Emergency Contraception "Plan B"

Emergency contraception (EC), also known as "Plan B" or "the morning after pill," provides an opportunity to prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse. It may be taken up to 120 hours (5 days) after unprotected intercourse; however, the sooner the first dose is initiated, the more effective it is. EC is available for purchase at UHS without a prescription by students age 17 or older.

The hormones in EC work primarily by delaying or preventing ovulation. They may also change the lining of the uterus, so that a fertilized egg cannot implant itself. EC does not interfere with an existing pregnancy. It only works to prevent a pregnancy from being established in the uterus.

EFFECTIVENESS

When used correctly, EC is between 75-90% effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy. The sooner the medication is initiated after unprotected intercourse, the higher the effectiveness may be. At any time, a woman's risk of becoming pregnant when having unprotected intercourse depends on where she is in her menstrual cycle.

SIDE EFFECTS AND RISKS

Temporary side effects may include breast tenderness, headache, and menstrual irregularities. EC is safe for almost all women. Even women who have been told they cannot take oral contraceptive pills on a regular basis can generally use EC safely. EC is not recommended for use during pregnancy because it simply will not work.

There are instances when EC may be unsafe:

- If you are pregnant.
- During a current migraine headache, especially if accompanied by neurological complications.
- If you have a history of stroke.
- If you have problems with blood clotting.

WHEN SHOULD A WOMAN USE EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

- A condom broke or fell off.
- She had sex without any birth control method.
- Her diaphragm slipped out of place.
- She missed more than two days of birth control pills.
- She was sexually assaulted/raped.

OBTAINING EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Plan B is available for purchase without a prescription for men or women who are age 17 or older. An appointment is not needed to purchase Plan B at UHS for those age 17 and older. EC is available at UHS by prescription for patients under age 17 and for patients over age 17 who prefer to purchase emergency contraception by prescription.

Plan B can be purchased at any one of the three UHS clinical offices. The office on the River Campus is located in the UHS Building. This office is open 7 days a week during the academic year (weekdays during school breaks and during the summer). The office in the Medical Center is open weekdays throughout the year, and the office at the Eastman School of Music is open weekdays during the academic year (except school vacations).

Patients under age 17 will need to schedule an appointment to see a health care provider at UHS. The prescription can be filled at UHS. The number to call is 275-2662.

A physical exam is not usually necessary. If the unprotected intercourse occurs on the weekend, you can call the UHS River Campus Office at 275-2662. The office is open from 9:00-5:00 on Saturday and 1:00-6:00 on Sunday (during the academic year, except school vacations).

Hotline Number: If you are out of town, or move to a new city, emergency contraception is available by calling the toll-free number 1-888-NOT-2-LATE. This hotline provides the names and phone numbers of clinicians in your area that provide EC. Now that Plan B is sold over-the-counter (i.e., no prescription needed), you can check area pharmacies to see if it is available.

ABOUT BIRTH CONTROL

UHS primary care providers do not recommend the routine use of EC as a birth control method. It is less effective and does not protect against sexually transmitted infections. If you are not currently using a reliable form of contraception or wish to discuss other options, please make an appointment with your primary care provider or with a women's health nurse practitioner at UHS to discuss this issue.

Many people ask if EC is dangerous to the fetus if you do become pregnant despite taking EC. There is a remote, theoretical risk, but there are no documented cases of EC causing harm to a fetus or causing a problem with pregnancy if it is continued.

Birth control pills can be started with your next period following EC. If you wish to begin using birth control pills, you can request a prescription for oral contraceptives at your appointment for EC, or you can call UHS at 275-2662 to schedule an appointment. You can purchase your pills at UHS for much less than an area pharmacy.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT AT UHS

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of gynecological and contraceptive services. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) or with one of the women's health nurse practitioners for gynecological care and to discuss contraceptive options. All visits to UHS are confidential.

When UHS offices are closed, a UHS physician is on-call and available by phone for urgent concerns that cannot wait until the offices re-open. Call 275-2662 to reach the physician on-call. You should not need to call the UHS physician on-call for emergency contraception unless you are nearing the 120-hour time limit.

LINKS

For more information, you can visit:

Planned Parenthood
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
<http://www.fda.gov>