

Emergency Contraception

What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency contraception is a method that can help prevent unplanned pregnancies if used as soon as possible after unprotected sex. Emergency contraception is not to be used as a frequent method of birth control; it is for emergency use only.

There are two methods of emergency contraception:

- **Oral Pill** – also called the “morning after pill”, taken within **5 days** of unprotected sex
 - **Plan B**
 - **Ella**
- **Copper Intrauterine Device (IUD)** – inserted within **7 days** of unprotected sex and provides ongoing birth control

When to Use Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception may be a good choice if you have had unprotected sex and you do not want to become pregnant. Emergency contraception cannot be used if you have unexplained vaginal bleeding or you are already pregnant.

Some reasons an individual may use emergency contraception include:

- Missed birth control (pill, patch, ring, injection)
- Condom slipped, broke, leaked, or was used incorrectly
- Diaphragm or cervical cap was forgotten or dislodged
- No contraception was used
- Fertility window calculation error
- Non-consensual sexual intercourse (sexual assault)

What is Plan B?

Plan B is an emergency contraceptive pill that contains a progestin called levonorgestrel. It does not contain estrogen. Plan B temporarily stops the release of an egg from the ovaries. If you are already pregnant, it will not affect the existing pregnancy. It does not provide ongoing protection.

Plan B is most effective when taken within 24 hours after unprotected sex, works best up to 3 days after unprotected sex, but can be effective up to 5 days after unprotected sex.

Plan B may not work as well for individuals who weigh over 165 lb (75 kg), especially individuals who weigh over 176 lb (80 kg).

Plan B is available at a pharmacy without a prescription for about \$30-40. It is also available at the Middlesex-London Health Unit for a reduced cost.

What is Ella?

Ella is an emergency contraceptive pill that contains the active ingredient ulipristal acetate. Ella temporarily stops the release of an egg from the ovaries. If you are already pregnant, it will not affect the existing pregnancy. It does not provide ongoing protection. Ella may reduce effectiveness of hormonal birth control, use a barrier method such as condoms until your next menstrual period.

Ella is most effective when taken as soon as possible, but it continues to be effective for up to 5 days.

Ella may not work as well for individuals who have a body mass index (BMI) over 35 or weigh approximately 194 lb (88 kg) or more.

Ella is available at pharmacies with a prescription for approximately \$40. It is also available at the Middlesex-London Health Unit for a reduced cost.

www.healthunit.com

Ella is more effective than Plan B if:

- It has been more than 3 days after unprotected sex
- You weigh over 165 lb (75 kg)

What is a Copper Intrauterine Device (IUD)?

A copper IUD is a small T-shaped device inserted into the uterus by a healthcare provider. The copper IUD prevents pregnancy by interfering with the sperm and egg to prevent fertilization. The copper IUD does not contain any hormones. The copper IUD can be left in place for ongoing birth control.

Copper IUD is the most effective method of emergency contraception at over 99% effective up to 7 days from unprotected sex regardless of weight.

A copper IUD must be prescribed and inserted by a qualified healthcare provider.

They are available for purchase at a pharmacy, price varies depending on brand.

Copper IUDs are available for purchase and insertion at the Middlesex-London Health Unit.

Important Points to Remember:

- Plan B and Ella may cause nausea. If vomiting occurs within 2 hours of Plan B, another dose must be taken. If vomiting occurs within 3 hours of Ella, another dose must be taken.
- When taking Plan B or Ella, your next menstrual period should come within 1 week of the expected time. If your menstrual period is late by more than 1 week, see a healthcare provider or take a pregnancy test.
- Emergency contraception does not protect against STIs or bloodborne infections (HIV or hepatitis).

For further information on emergency contraceptives Plan B and Ella, please visit:

<https://planb.ca/>

<https://www.ella-now.com/>

For more information, please visit or call the Middlesex-London Health Unit at 519-663-5317.

References:

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. (n.d.). *Emergency Contraception*. Sex & U. <https://www.sexandu.ca/contraception/emergency-contraception/>

Women's College Hospital. (n.d.). *Types of Emergency Contraception*. What's Next for Me? <http://whatsnextforme.ca/choices>

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