

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception is used to prevent pregnancy after having sex without birth control or after a birth control method used has failed. It is a good option for women who have had unprotected sex.

This pamphlet will explain:

- *The types of emergency contraception*
- *When and how it is used*
- *Any follow-up care you may need*

Emergency contraception can greatly reduce the chance of pregnancy after unprotected sex.



When Can Emergency Contraception Be Used?

Emergency contraception can be used if you have unprotected sex and don't want to get pregnant. It should not be used instead of birth control on a routine basis—regular use of a birth control method (such as condoms or birth control pills) is most effective. You may need emergency contraception if:

- You didn't use any birth control
- You had sex when you didn't plan to
- A condom broke or slipped off
- Birth control was not used correctly
- You were forced to have sex (rape)

There are many more reasons why someone has unprotected sex. No matter the reason, emergency contraception may be a good choice to prevent you from getting pregnant.

Doctor's offices, family planning clinics, and hospital emergency rooms can prescribe emergency contraception pills. They can be bought at a drug store with a prescription.

Call your doctor's office right away if you have had unprotected sex. Be sure to tell him or her you need treatment without delay. In some cases, your doctor can call in a prescription for you to your local drug store.

You may want to ask your doctor about giving you an advance prescription for emergency contraception pills. This way, you will have it on hand if you need it.

Emergency contraception pills must be started within 72 hours of having unprotected sex. If you are already pregnant, emergency contraception will not work.

Types of Emergency Contraception

The most commonly used method of emergency contraception is pills. The *intrauterine device*

(*IUD*) also can be used for emergency contraception (see box).

There are two types of emergency contraception pills. One type is combined oral contraceptives—birth control pills that contain the hormones *estrogen* and *progestin*. The other type uses only one of the hormones—progestin.

Both types of pills work the same way. Both are given in a higher dose than that used normally for birth control. The higher doses of these pills prevent pregnancy because they disrupt the normal hormone patterns in the menstrual cycle.

The emergency contraception pills may be prescribed to you in three forms:

- A combination of regular birth control pills (contains estrogen and progestin)
- A prepared kit with a pregnancy test and four pills (contains estrogen and progestin)
- A package with two pills (contains progestin only)

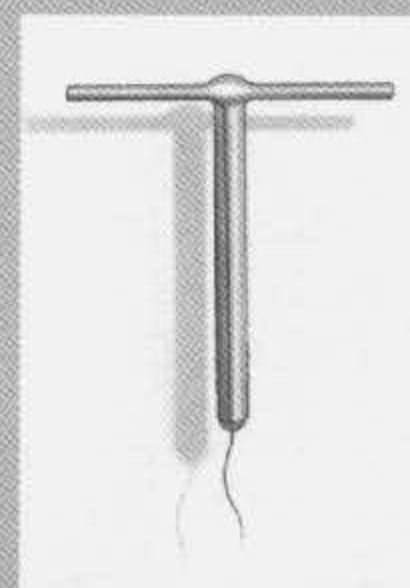
The kit with the pregnancy test and four pills also contains detailed instructions. You should read them first. Then, take the pregnancy test to confirm you are not pregnant from a previous time you had sex.

If the pregnancy test results are positive, do not take the pills. Emergency contraception will not work if you are pregnant. Talk to your doctor. If the test results are negative, take the pills as directed to prevent pregnancy.



The Intrauterine Device

The IUD is another type of emergency contraception. The IUD must be inserted within 5–7 days of having unprotected sex. A benefit of the IUD is that it can be left in for long-term use. The IUD may be a good choice if you cannot take birth control pills. The IUD is not a good choice for someone who is at risk for *sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)*.



How to Take the Pills

For the pills to work, timing is everything. The sooner you start them, the better. The pills are given in two doses. To prevent pregnancy, the first dose of emergency contraception pills must be taken by mouth within 72 hours of having unprotected sex. A second dose is taken 12 hours after the first dose. The number of pills in the dose depends on the brand of pill used.

After taking emergency contraception pills, you may have some nausea and vomiting. The progestin-only pills cause less nausea and vomiting. Any nausea and vomiting will go away in about 1 or 2 days. Your doctor may give you an anti-nausea medicine to take 1 hour before you take the emergency contraception pills.

If you vomit within 1 hour of taking either dose, let your doctor know right away. You may need to repeat that dose.

Other side effects may include:

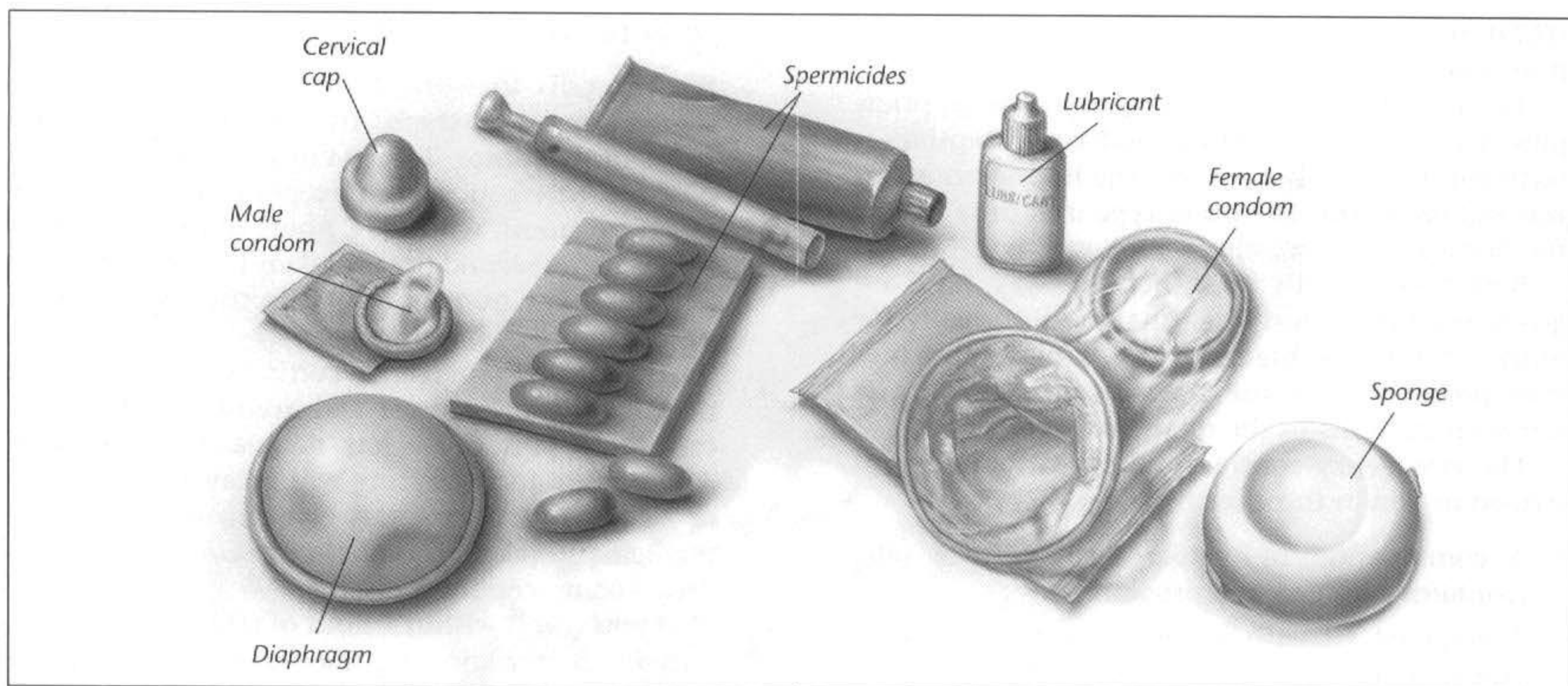
- Abdominal pain and cramps
- Tender breasts
- Headache
- Feeling dizzy

Any side effects will go away within a few days. Also, your next period may not be regular—it may be early or late or light or heavy.

Follow-Up Care

If you use emergency contraception pills within 72 hours of unprotected sex, your chance of getting pregnant is greatly reduced. But, there is still a chance you could become pregnant. It is not as effective as using birth control on a regular basis. Ask your doctor about a method of birth control that you can use regularly.

If you have sex after you use emergency contraception pills, you should use a backup method such as a condom, spermicide, cervical cap, sponge, or diaphragm until you get your period. If you were taking birth control pills before, you should keep taking the pills and use a backup method. If you have not had a period within 21 days of taking the pills, you should see your doctor for a pregnancy test.



Other methods of contraception.

Keep in mind that emergency contraception does not prevent STDs. Your doctor may suggest that you be tested for STDs. There are steps you can take to protect yourself (see box).

Protect Yourself

You can reduce the risk of STDs, including HIV, if you:

- Know your partner. It's not just your own behavior that puts you at risk for infection—it's your partner's too. Ask about his sexual history and whether he has ever used IV drugs.
- Limit sexual partners. The more partners you or your partners have, the higher the risk of getting an STD.
- Use a latex condom. Proper condom use helps protect you and your partner from infection with STDs.
- Avoid risky sex practices. Sexual acts that tear or break the skin carry a higher risk of STDs. Even small cuts that don't bleed let germs in and out. Anal sex poses a high risk because tissues in the rectum break easily.

Finally...

Using birth control when you have sex is the best way to prevent unwanted pregnancy. If you have sex without birth control, though, you can use emergency contraception. It is simple and safe. It can greatly reduce the chance of pregnancy after unprotected sex. Call your doctor right away if you've had unprotected sex and don't want to become pregnant.

Glossary

Estrogen: A female hormone produced in the ovaries that stimulates the growth of the lining of the uterus.

Intrauterine Device (IUD): A small device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

Progestin: A synthetic form of progesterone that is similar to the hormone produced naturally by the body.

Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD): A disease that is spread by sexual contact, including chlamydial infection, gonorrhea, genital warts, herpes, syphilis, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]).

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