

# Emergency contraception

Emergency contraception can help keep you from getting pregnant if you had sex without using birth control or if your birth control method did not work. Emergency contraception is also called the “morning after pill.” But you do not need to wait until the morning after unprotected sex to take it. There are two types of FDA-approved emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs). Some ECPs can work when taken within five days of unprotected sex or when your birth control does not work correctly. Some ECPs are available without a prescription.

## Q: What types of emergency contraception pills are available?

**A:** In the United States, there are two types of FDA-approved ECPs available for emergency contraception:

- **ella®** (ulipristal acetate)
- **Plan B One-Step®** (Levonorgestral [LNG]) — Plan B One-Step® has several generic versions. Some common generic versions include AfterPill®, My Way®, Next Choice One Dose®, and Take Action®.

## Q: How do I get emergency contraception?

**A:** It depends on the type of emergency contraception you need.

- **Plan B One-Step®** and similar generic versions are available in stores without a prescription to anyone, of any age. If you do not see it on the shelf, ask the pharmacist for help.
- **LNG** tablets (two-pill generic Next Choice® and LNG tablets, 0.75 mg) are available to people aged 17 and older without a prescription. These brands are sold from behind the pharmacy counter.
- **ella®** is available only by prescription from your doctor, nurse, or family planning clinic.

## Q: How quickly should I use emergency contraception after unprotected sex?

**A:** Emergency contraception works best when you use it **as soon as possible** after unprotected sex. If you are unable to take it right away, emergency contraception can still work to prevent pregnancy if taken up to three to five days after unprotected sex. How long after depends on which type of emergency contraception you use.

- Take **Plan B One-Step®** or a generic version as soon as possible **within three days** (or 72 hours) after unprotected sex.
- For the two-dose version (Next Choice®, LNG tablets, 0.75 mg), take one pill as soon as possible **within three days** and the second pill **12 hours later**.
- Take **ella® (ulipristal acetate)** as soon as possible **within five days** (or 120 hours) after unprotected sex.

## Q: How do emergency contraception pills prevent pregnancy?

**A:** Research shows that emergency contraception pills work mostly by preventing or delaying ovulation (the release of an egg from the ovary). Less commonly, emergency contraception may prevent fertilization of the egg by the sperm if ovulation has already happened. If a fertilized egg has already implanted in your uterus (you are pregnant), emergency contraception pills will not stop or harm your pregnancy.

## Q: Can I get emergency contraception pills before I need them?

**A:** Yes. Your doctor can give you a prescription to fill so you can have emergency contraception at home to use when you need it. Or you can buy some types of emergency contraception pills from a store at any time.

## Q: How can I get free or low-cost emergency contraception?

**A:** Under the Affordable Care Act (the health care law), most insurance plans cover FDA-approved emergency contraception and birth control at no cost to you. This includes Plan B One-Step® and ella®. Since you can buy Plan B One-Step® or the generic version in a store, without a prescription, call your insurance company to find out whether your plan covers over-the-counter emergency contraception.

- If you have insurance, check with your insurance provider to find out what's included in your plan.

- If you have Medicaid, your insurance may cover emergency contraception. Coverage varies between states, so check with your state's Medicaid program to learn what your benefits are.
- If you don't have insurance, don't panic. Family planning or health clinics like Planned Parenthood may provide emergency contraception for free or at low cost. Call your local clinic to learn more. To sign up for low-cost or no-cost health insurance, visit [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov).

For information about other services covered by the Affordable Care Act, visit [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov).

## For more information...

For more information on emergency contraception, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Food and Drug Administration (FDA), HHS</b><br/>Phone Number: 888-463-6332<br/><a href="http://www.fda.gov/">www.fda.gov/</a></li> <li>• <b>Office of Population Affairs (OPA), HHS</b><br/>Phone Number: 240-453-2888<br/><a href="http://www.hhs.gov/opa/">www.hhs.gov/opa/</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Planned Parenthood Federation of America</b><br/>Phone Number: 800-230-7526<br/><a href="http://www.plannedparenthood.org/">www.plannedparenthood.org/</a></li> <li>• <b>The Emergency Contraception Website</b><br/><a href="http://ec.princeton.edu/">ec.princeton.edu/</a></li> </ul> |
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The Office on Women's Health is grateful for the additional reviews by:

- Food and Drug Administration, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, Division of Bone, Reproductive and Urologic Products staff
- James Trussell, Ph.D., Professor of Economics and Public Affairs, Emeritus, Senior Demographer, Office of Population Research, Princeton University

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