

Emergency Contraceptive Pill

ALMOST INCONCEIVABLE



Internet photo

PLAN B

(LEVONORGESTEREL, 0.75 mg tablets)

I have heard that there is some “pill” you can take after you’ve had sex that would stop you from getting pregnant. How does this pill work & how would you get this pill?

There is a prescription medication that is called the Morning After Pill (MAP), Post-coital contraception (after-sex) or most currently referred to as the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) that can be taken in emergency situations.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP) can be used for risk of pregnancy related to unprotected sexual intercourse which could include:

1. Breakage or slippage of barrier methods (i.e. condoms, diaphragm, cervical cap, etc.).
2. No method used.
3. Missed 2 or more BCP in current package or the pill free period was extended beyond 7 days.
4. Sexual assault.
5. Late for Depo Provera injection (beyond 14 weeks since last injection).

ECP are available in Canada by prescription and intended for one time use or very occasional use. If a woman uses ECP multiple times during the year, her cumulative risk of pregnancy would be higher than if she used oral contraceptive pills (OCP) or other contraceptive methods consistently.

The ECP must be prescribed by a Dr. in their office or at the local outpatients department and requires taking 2 pills (usually high dose hormone pills) within 72 hours of the last unprotected (or not properly protected) sexual intercourse and then 2 more pills 12 hours later. Depending on which brand of pills your Dr. prescribes, you may have to take 4 or 5 pills and then 4 or 5 more. This method is only 75 % effective. Health Protection Branch has not approved the use of these high dose hormone pills for this indication.

OR

You may be prescribed a Plan B method which requires taking 1 pill within 72 hours of the last unprotected (or not properly protected) sexual intercourse and then 1 more pill 12 hours later. This

method is 89% effective. This method is Health Protection Branch approved and specifically indicated for the use as an emergency contraceptive treatment.

Usually this medication makes you sick to your stomach so you may also need to take an anti-nauseant like Gravol to combat the side effects. Not everyone can take this medication because of medical risk factors and this is why you need to see a Dr. to make sure it is O.K. for you to take without severe side effects occurring.

This pill is recommended as an emergency method **only** which means it could be beneficial to someone who has not used any form of birth control or the method they have used has failed (i.e.. a condom slips off or breaks).

Statistics have shown that ECP is not 100% effective even if ECP is used properly. As with any method of birth control (other then abstinence) there is a chance that it may not work. In this situation you would have to consider your pregnancy options (keeping the baby, giving the baby up for adoption or having an abortion).

Did you know?

The ECP works in one of three ways:

- 1) It can prevent or delay ovulation (release of an egg) if the pills are taken early enough in the woman's menstrual cycle.
- 2) It can prevent implantation of a fertilized egg by creating an unfavorable environment.
- 3) It can prevent fertilization of the egg by preventing the egg from traveling to the uterus (therefore unable to meet up with sperm).

There is no sure way for a woman to know at which point this medication is intervening in her cycle and therefore you must carefully analyze your feelings about the ways in which the ECP could be working in your body. Moral issues may prevent this form of emergency birth control from being an option for you. This also leaves physicians in a moral dilemma which may lead them to denying you a prescription for the ECP. The Dr. must however explain to you why they will not prescribe this medication to you and then refer you to another Dr.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the Student Health Centre at 364-2163, Telecare New Brunswick 1-800-244-8353 or Emergency Department at your local hospital.

References: The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
 Canadian Pharmacists Association "Oops!" pamphlet
 Paladin Labs Inc. Information about Plan B