



Emergency Contraception Pills (ECPs)

What Are ECPs?

Emergency Contraception Pills (ECPs) are a form of emergency contraception that when taken within 120 hours (5 days) of unprotected sex, can prevent pregnancy from occurring. Because ECPs prevent pregnancy before it begins, it is not the same as an abortion. Although it is not widely publicized, this form of birth control is available in many doctors' offices, clinics, and pharmacies. No prescription is needed to purchase ECPs at a pharmacy. ECPs can be purchased by women and men.

When do I need ECPs?

ECPs are meant to be used as emergency contraception. Some situations where this method would be appropriate include:

- if a condom breaks, slips, leaks or falls off during intercourse
- if your diaphragm slips out of place during intercourse
- if you forgot to take your birth control pills
- if you had sex when you did not expect to and did not use any birth control during intercourse
- if you were forced to have sex

If you experience any of the above situations, your risk of becoming pregnant depends on which day in your menstrual cycle that you had sex. The days when you are most likely to get pregnant are right in the middle of your menstrual cycle – about 14 days after the start of your last period. If you have unprotected sex during these days, there is a high chance that you could get pregnant. ECPs can cut down the risk of pregnancy to about 80% if taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse. ECPs can also be used for an additional 2 days; however the effectiveness rate declines with each passing day.

How Do ECPs Work?

At Allentown Women's Center, we use Levonorgestrel, a progestin-only emergency contraceptive approved by the FDA. Levonorgestrel may prevent pregnancy by temporarily stopping the release of an egg from a woman's ovary or it may prevent fertilization. It may also prevent a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus. Levonorgestrel will not work if you are already pregnant. Levonorgestrel does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases and should not be used in place of regular contraception. Correct and consistent use of regular contraception is more effective.

How do I take Levonorgestrel?

To obtain Levonorgestrel, please call our office. ECPs can be picked up during our regular office hours. After your next period, we recommend that you schedule an appointment for a complete gynecological exam, including a breast exam and a pap test (if you have not done so in the past year).

Side Effects

It is very common to have side effects when using ECPs. Some common side effects are nausea and vomiting, breast tenderness, headache, dizziness, break-through-bleeding, bloating, abdominal pain, fatigue and menstrual irregularities. These side effects are not long-term and are not considered serious. Your next period may start a few days earlier or a few days later than usual.