

# Emergency Contraception ?

Commonly known as 'EC' or the 'The Morning After Pill'



Family Planning Tasmania  
sexuality education & clinical services

## What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency Contraception (EC) is available for women who are at risk of an unintended pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse (unprotected sex).

EC may need to be used where there is a risk of unintended pregnancy because:

- Contraception was not used.
- Contraception may have failed (missed pill, condom broke or came off).
- Unreliable method i.e. withdrawal method.



There are 3 types of Emergency Contraception ('EC') available in Australia:

- Levonorgestrel emergency contraceptive pill. Brand names vary. A common one is "Postinor".
- Ulipristal acetate emergency contraceptive pill. Brand name is EllaOne.
- A copper intrauterine device (IUD) inserted within 5 days of unprotected sexual intercourse by a trained doctor or nurse.

## How does it work?

- Both types of the EC pill work by stopping or delaying the release of an egg (ovulation).
- EC pills do not prevent implantation of a fertilised egg.
- Copper IUDs prevent fertilisation & implantation of an egg.

## How well does it work?

- 85 - 99.5% effective depending on which type you use.
- EC pills are most effective if taken in the first 24 hrs after unprotected sex.
- The Ulipristal acetate EC pill is more effective than the Levonorgestrel EC pill.
- Copper IUD can be more than 99% effective if used within 5 days of unprotected sex.

*Copper IUD insertion requires at least 2 visits to specially trained health professionals and can be difficult to organise in the required 5 day time frame.*

## Where can I get Emergency Contraception?

EC pills are available over the counter at pharmacies, emergency departments and Family Planning Tasmania. **You do not need a prescription.**

Prices vary between \$20 - \$45 for EC pills. Costs are lower if you have a Concession card and/or Medicare card.

If you are under 16, the pharmacist may ask you some questions to make sure you understand the effects of taking the EC pill.

You can obtain a Copper IUD from Family Planning Tasmania clinics. You will need 2 appointments to have a Copper IUD fitted, 1 for the assessment and 1 to fit the IUD. Copper IUDs cost approx. \$100.

# Emergency Contraception ?

Commonly known as 'EC' or the 'The Morning After Pill'

## Is EC right for me?

Emergency Contraception may **not be** the right choice if you are:

- Taking certain types of medication, including other contraceptives.
- Breast feeding.
- Overweight. You may need to take a double dose if you are taking the Levonorgestrel EC pill.

## Possible side effects

- Menstrual changes.
- Nausea.
- Headaches.
- Breast tenderness.
- Dizziness.



## What could stop EC from working?

Emergency contraceptive pills may not work if you:

- Miss the 3-5 day time frame.
- Vomit within 2-3 hours of taking them.
- Are taking certain medications (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

## How do I take EC?

- Take the tablet as soon as possible.
- If vomiting occurs within 2 hours of taking Levonorgestrel EC pill, or within 3 hours after taking Ulipristal acetate EC pill, another dose should be taken.
- Some medications can reduce the effectiveness of the EC Pill (check with your pharmacist or doctor).

## What else do I need to know?

- EC pills do not provide **ongoing contraception** after they are taken.
- If you have further unprotected sex you should take the EC Pill again as the previous dose will not be effective.
- You can take EC Pills more than once per menstrual cycle. It is important to use the same type as switching to another type during a cycle can reduce the effectiveness.
- Some contraceptive pills can affect Emergency Contraception (check with your pharmacist or doctor).
- After taking EC pills your period may be slightly earlier or later.
- You should take a pregnancy test if your period is more than a week late, unusual in any way or if you are displaying any pregnancy symptoms e.g. breast tenderness, nausea, urinary frequency.
- If the EC Pill is accidentally taken during pregnancy, there is no evidence to suggest that it is harmful to the developing embryo or foetus. It does not cause an abortion.
- If you use the Ulipristal acetate EC pill while breast feeding, you will need to express and discard your breast milk for 7 days.
- A Copper IUD provides ongoing contraception and is 99.5% effective in preventing pregnancies.
- A Copper IUD is safe to insert from 6 weeks after giving birth.
- Emergency Contraception does not protect you from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs).

