

# Emergency Contraceptive (EC) Medicine

## What is emergency contraceptive (EC) medicine?

Emergency contraceptive (EC) medicine is used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or if another birth control method fails (for example, if a condom breaks or you forget to take your regular birth control). EC medicine is also known as “the morning-after pill,” but some can be taken up to 5 days after sex. **However, the sooner you take EC medicine, the better it works.**

## How does EC medicine work?

EC medicine works in 3 ways:

- It may temporarily stop the egg from leaving the ovary (ovulation).
- It may stop the sperm from meeting the egg (fertilization).
- It may stop a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus.

## Where can I get EC medicine?

If you are a victim of rape or sexual assault, any hospital will provide EC medicine at your request.

You can get EC medicine from a pharmacy:

- **Plan B** (levonorgestrel) is the most common type of EC medicine. Plan B can be bought over-the-counter without a prescription (no matter your age). It is most effective within 2 days but it can be taken on the third day after sex.
- **Ella** (ulipristal acetate) is taken as a single dose within 5 days after sex. Ella may be more effective for women who are overweight or close to ovulation. You'll need a prescription to get Ella.

Call the pharmacy to make sure it has the EC you want.



## Common questions about EC medicine

- **Is EC medicine guaranteed to work?** No. EC medicine will not stop all pregnancies. For the best chance of preventing pregnancy, use EC as soon as possible after having unprotected sex.  
Plan B is up to 95 % effective if taken within 1 day (24 hours) of unprotected sex. It is up to 89 % effective if taken within 3 days (72 hours). Ella is up to 95 % effective if taken within 5 days (120 hours).
- **Should I keep taking my regular birth control after taking EC medicine?** Yes. If you use birth control pills, be sure to take them for the rest of your cycle.
- **If I am pregnant, will taking EC harm the fetus?** No. EC hormones will not harm a fetus.
- **My doctor has told me that I shouldn't take estrogen for medical reasons. Can I take EC medicine?** Yes. Plan B and Ella do not contain estrogen. If you receive a medicine other than Plan B or Ella, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it contains estrogen.
- **Can EC prevent sexually transmitted infections?** No. EC medicine does not protect you against HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

- **How often can I use EC medicine?** You can use EC medicine as often as you need to, but it should only be used in emergencies. It should not be used as a substitute for regular, long-term methods of contraception.

(Birth control methods used before or during sex are often more effective at preventing unplanned pregnancies than EC. For more information about birth control, talk to your doctor or see the Intermountain fact sheet: [\*Birth Control Basics\*](#).)

- **Can I take EC medicine while I take other medicines?** Maybe. Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all medicines you currently take, including over-the-counter medicines, supplements, inhalers, and patches. Some medicines may interact with EC or make it less effective, including:
  - Anticonvulsants, such as Luminal (phenobarbital)
  - Antibiotics for tuberculosis, such as Rifadin IV (rifampin)
  - Antiretroviral medicines such as tenofovir.
  - Antifungal medicines such as Diflucan (fluconazole)
  - Barbiturate medicines such as Amytal Sodium (amobarbital)
  - St. John's wort supplements

**Do not take Ella if you are taking a proton pump inhibitor such as Prilosec (omeprazole) or Prevacid (lansoprazole).**

- **Are there any side effects with EC medicine?** Yes. EC medicine can cause these temporary side effects:
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Pain in the lower abdomen
  - Severe tiredness
  - Headache or dizziness
  - Breast tenderness

- **Can EC medicine affect my next period?** Yes. After taking EC medicine, your next period may be a few days early or late. You may also notice a change in the flow.

- **Can EC medicine cause an abortion?** No. EC medicine is NOT the same as the abortion pill (RU-486). It will not end a pregnancy once the fertilized egg has implanted in the uterus.
- **Could EC medicine keep me from getting pregnant in the future?** No. EC medicine does not cause infertility, although it may make your cycles less regular for a short time.
- **Are there alternatives to EC medicine?** Yes. A copper intrauterine device (IUD) is a highly effective emergency contraceptive. The device must be placed by a healthcare professional within 5 days of unprotected sex.

Ask your healthcare provider for advice about other forms or methods of emergency contraception.

**Do NOT try to adjust the dose of birth control pills as an EC method without specific advice from your healthcare provider.**



### When should I call my doctor?

Call your healthcare provider if:

- You vomit within 2 hours after taking an EC pill. You may need to take another dose.
- You have heavy bleeding (soaking 1 pad in an hour or less).
- Your next period is more than a week late. This may be a sign that you are pregnant.
- You have severe abdominal pain. This may be a sign of an **ectopic pregnancy**. An ectopic pregnancy is a fertilized egg that has attached outside the uterus, usually in a fallopian tube (the tube that connects the ovary to the uterus).

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