



there's still time for  
plan B.

## EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION: BUSTING THE MYTHS

Emergency Contraception (EC) is a dose of the hormone progestogen (levonorgestrel) taken after sexual intercourse to reduce the risk of pregnancy where contraception may have failed or not been used. As the name suggests, it is to be used for emergencies and should not replace regular forms of contraception.

### What is Emergency Contraception?

Emergency Contraception (EC) is a dose of progestogen (levonorgestrel) taken after sex to reduce the risk of pregnancy. It's sometimes wrongly called the 'morning after pill', because it can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected sex, although it's more effective the sooner it's taken.

### Is taking Emergency Contraception like having an abortion?

**No, it isn't.** EC is **not** the same as RU486 (mifepristone).

The progestogen in EC works mainly by delaying the release of an egg by the ovary (ovulation).

It may also work by changing the lining of the uterus so a fertilised egg can't take hold, and may make the mucus (sticky fluid) at the opening of the uterus thicker so sperm can't get through.

If a fertilised egg has embedded itself in the womb EC will not work, so it is not like having an abortion. If EC has not worked for some reason and you do get pregnant it will not affect the baby.

**Emergency contraception DOES NOT cause an abortion.**

### I have only had sexual intercourse for the first time, so I don't need Emergency Contraception, do I?

**Yes, you do!** You can get pregnant any time you have unprotected sex even if it's the first time. Unprotected sex is when you don't use any contraception (such as condoms or the Pill). There are lots of myths around when you can and can't get pregnant, such as: if you haven't started your periods yet, when you're on your period, if the guy pulls out, if you do it standing up or wash afterwards – but these are not true. If you have had unprotected sex you need to take EC as soon as possible to reduce your risk of pregnancy.

### How effective is Emergency Contraception?

Within 24 hours	95% effective
Within 2 days	85% effective
Within 3–5 days	60% effective

The effectiveness decreases the longer you wait. It may be used up to 5 days (120 hours) after sex. You may still be pregnant if you took EC – always follow up with a pregnancy test if your period does not come within a week of when you expected it, if it is much lighter than usual or if it is more than three weeks after taking EC. And get checked for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) too!

**EC is most effective if taken in the first 24 hours.**

### How do I take Emergency Contraception?

EC is available either as two (0.75mg) tablets or one (1.5mg) tablet. Take the **WHOLE DOSE** immediately (both tablets or the single tablet). This is the most effective method of taking EC. If you have any further questions contact SHine SA's Sexual Healthline.

### You can only take EC once, right?

**Wrong.** You can use EC as often as necessary, but if you are going to use it frequently it's important to know that there are cheaper, more reliable methods of contraception you could choose.

**Remember, when choosing a regular method of contraception, condoms are the only method that also reduces your risk of sexually transmitted infections.**

### I can't take Emergency Contraception more than once in one menstrual cycle, can I?

**Yes you can!** You can take EC more than once in the same month if you need to, but it may be less effective. However, it is important to take it again if you have had further unprotected sex and you want to reduce the risk of pregnancy.

# EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION: **BUSTING THE MYTHS**

## How do I get Emergency Contraception?

EC is available over the counter at pharmacies. You can also get it at SHine SA clinics, Clinic 275, Pregnancy Advisory Centre and many public hospital emergency departments.

Some pharmacists may not supply EC if you had unprotected sex over 72 hours ago, as these are the current recommendations in the product information. However, research supports its use up to 5 days.

## Can my partner or friend go to the pharmacy to get Emergency Contraception for me?

Generally they can't but check with the pharmacist. This is because you will need to answer a few questions to make sure that EC is safe for you to take.

## What questions might I be asked to get EC?

Before you can be given EC you will have to answer a few questions to see if it's suitable for you. They will take you to a quiet area to talk to you, where no one else can hear what you are discussing. This is entirely confidential. If you are worried about confidentiality you can ask them to explain their policy to you. You may be asked:

- + if the EC is for your own use
- + your age
- + when you had unprotected sex
- + when you had your last period
- + if it's the first time you've had unprotected sex since your period
- + whether you have any allergies
- + if you suffer from any medical conditions or have had any recent illness
- + about any medication you are currently taking, including herbal medication

## What does Emergency Contraception cost?

Prices vary. The cost depends on where you get it.

## You're likely to be sick when you take Emergency Contraception, aren't you?

**No, you're not.** Most women will neither feel nor be sick. Only 1% of women who take EC will be sick. EC can occasionally cause nausea, breast pain, dizziness, tiredness, headaches and spot bleeding. If you vomit within two hours of taking EC you will need to take another dose. Side effects usually stop within two days. If you are worried about any side effects, see a doctor.

## EC affects your long-term fertility, doesn't it?

**No, it doesn't.** There is no evidence that EC affects fertility. But remember, if you have had unprotected sex there is a chance that you may have picked up a sexually transmitted infection. One STI called Chlamydia can cause infertility if left untreated. It is estimated that 1 in 10 young people have Chlamydia with no symptoms at all. That is why it is important to get checked for sexually transmitted infections if you have had unprotected sexual intercourse.

## When will I have my next period?

For most women the next period will come at the normal time. A few may be early and up to 30% may be up to a week late.

## Do I need a pregnancy test?

If your period does not come within a week of when you expected it, if it is much lighter than usual or if it is more than three weeks after taking EC, do a pregnancy test.

## Is it safe to take Emergency Contraception when you are breast feeding?

It's safe to use EC when you are breastfeeding. It will not decrease your milk supply. Some progestogen may come through the milk, but there is no evidence this harms your baby.

## Am I at risk of a sexually transmitted infection?

EC **does not** protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you had unprotected sex it's best to get tested. This is normally done two to three weeks after unprotected sex. A condom is the only form of contraception that will reduce the risk of STIs.

## Important information to remember:

- + Don't forget it's best to take EC within the first 24 hours.
- + You can get EC over the counter at pharmacies.
- + If you have unprotected sex again, be sure to take EC again.
- + if you vomit within two hours of taking EC you will need to take another dose.
- + EC never protects against sexually transmitted infection. Always use a condom and make sure you're using a water-based lubricant to reduce the risk of condom breakages.
- + Research shows that EC works the same way as other hormonal contraceptive methods.
- + Emergency contraception **DOES NOT** cause an abortion.
- + It will not work if you are already pregnant.

## MORE INFO:

- + [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)
- + Call our Sexual Healthline on 1300 883 793 or Toll Free 1800 188 171 (Country Callers)