Why use ECPs?

Emergency Contraceptive Pills are birth control pills taken within 120 hours of an episode of unprotected intercourse to reduce the chance of pregnancy. Examples of unprotected intercourse include: no birth control method used, broken condom, other method failure or misuse, or sexual assault.

What are ECPs?

Emergency Contraceptive Pills are a particular birth control pill prescribed at a different dosage than what women normally use for ongoing contraception. The University Health Center is using Plan B ECPs. Plan B is a progestin birth control pill containing Levonorgestrel in a special dosage designed for use as emergency contraception. We are using this formulation because it is associated with fewer side effects than the estrogen/progestin ECP, and it is more effective.

How do Plan B ECPs work?

Emergency Contraceptive Pills may prevent pregnancy in one or more of the following ways:

- by preventing ovulation.
- by temporarily altering the uterine lining.
- by reducing the chance of fertilization in the fallopian tube.

Emergency Contraceptive Pills are NOT the Abortion Pill (often known as RU486).

How effective are the Plan B ECPs?

If Plan B is taken within 120 hours of unprotected sex it has been shown to reduce the risk of pregnancy from one episode of intercourse up to 88%.

Emergency Contraceptive Pills are not recommended as an “ongoing” method of birth control, because consistent use of most other birth control methods is more effective in preventing pregnancy.

How to take Plan B ECP

They should be taken as soon as possible after an episode of unprotected intercourse, but no later than 120 hours. One Plan B tablet is taken with food, followed by one more tablet with food in 12 hours, or both tablets can be taken at the same time.

Who should not take Plan B?

Plan B should not be taken if you are already pregnant or if you have an allergy to Plan B (Levonorgestrel). Do not use Plan B if you currently have unexplained vaginal bleeding.

What are some of the risks and side effects of Plan B ECPs?

Most women can safely take Plan B and serious side effects are rare. Side effects that may occur include nausea (23% of users), abdominal pain (18% of users), tiredness (17% of users), and headache (17% of users). Other side effects that can occur are dizziness and breast tenderness (10% of users) and vomiting or diarrhea (5-6% of users).

You can use an over-the-counter anti-nausea medication, like Dramamine or Bonine, to reduce nausea. These medications work best if taken 1 hour to 1/2 hour before you take the ECPs.

Menstrual bleeding can be heavier or lighter than usual after taking Plan B. Most women will get their next period within one week of when it is expected.

Progestin only birth control pills taken on a daily basis for ongoing contraception slightly increase a woman’s risk for a tubal pregnancy, if a pregnancy occurs while using the medication. Plan B and Progestin only pills do not increase the risk of tubal pregnancy in future pregnancies. If you experience severe abdominal pain, you should contact your provider immediately.

REMEMBER:

1. Your next period should begin within two to three weeks. If your period has not started in three weeks, make an appointment in Women’s Health for a pregnancy test.
2. If your current method of contraception is the birth control pill, skip one pill for the day you take the ECPs. You will need to use an additional method of contraception until you have been back on your pill for seven days.
3. Emergency Contraceptive Pills are not 100% effective, so you could still become pregnant.

The decision to use Emergency Contraceptive Pills is a very personal decision. If you have unanswered questions or concerns regarding the use of the ECPs please discuss the matter further with your practitioner. For questions you can call Women’s Health at (301) 314-8190.

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