

Emergency Contraception Pills (ECPs)

(Note: information is for low-dose combined pills only, not progestin pills)

What Are They?

ECPs are a hormonal method of contraception that can be used to prevent pregnancy following an act of unprotected sexual intercourse.

How Effective Are They?

If 100 young women used ECPs once, typically two of them would become pregnant.

How Do ECPs Work?

ECPs are thought to prevent ovulation and fertilization. They are not effective once the process of implantation of a fertilized ovum has begun.

Advantages

- * Are safe for all adolescents and readily available.
- * Reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy and need for abortion.
- * Are appropriate for use after unprotected intercourse (including rape or contraceptive failure).
- * Provide a bridge to the practice of regular contraception.
- * Drug exposure and side effects are of short duration.

Disadvantages

- * Do not protect against STIs/HIV.
- * Do not provide ongoing protection against pregnancy.
- * **Should be used within five days of unprotected intercourse as effectiveness decreases with time.**
- * May change the time of the adolescent's next period.
- * **Are inappropriate for regular use (high cumulative pregnancy rate).**

Possible Side Effects

Most adolescents experience no side effects. Occasionally, an adolescent may experience:

- * Nausea
- * Vomiting
- * Headaches or dizziness
- * Cramping
- * Breast tenderness
- * Side effects generally do not last for more than 24 hours.

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CLIENT INSTRUCTIONS

1. Show the client the ECPs and explain the following:

How to Use ECPs

- * Swallow four tablets as soon as possible after unprotected sex. Do not delay treatment unnecessarily as effectiveness decreases over time.
- * Swallow the second four tablets 12 hours after the first dose.
- * **Important:** ECPs can be used for up to five days (120 hours) after the occurrence of unprotected sex.
- * If vomiting occurs within one hour after either dose, repeat the dose. If vomiting is severe, putting the pills in the vagina may be effective.
- * To reduce nausea, take the tablets after eating or before bed.
- * **Do not take any extra ECPs unless vomiting occurs.** More pills will **not** further decrease the risk of pregnancy.

Possible Side Effects

- * Most adolescent women experience no side effects.
- * Occasionally, adolescents may experience side effects (explain possible side effects, see front of card).

What to Expect After Using ECPs

- * There will not be any immediate signs showing whether the ECPs worked.
- * The menstrual period should come on time (or a few days early or late).

Reasons to Return to Provider

- * Period is more than a week later than expected.
- * Any other cause for concern.

Have the Client Repeat this Information Back to You.

2. Offer contraceptive counselling, and, if she chooses, **give the client a method of contraception before she leaves.** Explain that condoms must also be used with the method, in order to protect against STIs/HIV.