Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraceptives are methods to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse. They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections. Emergency contraception can be used when:

- A condom breaks.
- After a sexual assault.
- You forgot to take your birth control pills.
- When inadequate protection with sexual intercourse occurs.
- Unprotected sexual intercourse occurs.

EC pills will not work if you are already pregnant. Also, they will not harm the baby if you are pregnant. **Do not** use emergency contraceptives as your only protection against pregnancy if you are sexually active or planning to be. They are not as effective as any ongoing contraceptive method. However, EC can be used more than once even in the same menstrual cycle. Speak to your caregiver for information on birth control methods.

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVE PILLS

There are mainly two types.

- **Hormone contraceptive pill.** Some types of birth control pills that contain estrogen and progesterone when taken in higher doses may also work for emergency contraception. However, they may have more side effects, may not be as effective. You should speak to your caregiver about how to take them before using them as EC. Not all brands of birth control pills can be used for EC.
- **Plan B** uses two pills with a high dose of progesterone in the pill or one pill with a double dose of progesterone. You can take the double dose in the one pill, take the 2 pills at one time or take the two pills 12 to 24 hours apart within 120 hours after intercourse. There are less side effects with Plan B. It is more effective in preventing pregnancy.

Some people call emergency contraceptive pills *morning after pills.* However, you do not have to wait until the morning after. You can start the pills right away, or up to 5 days after you have had unprotected sex. That is, sex during which you did not use birth control or if you think your birth control failed. Therapy is more effective the earlier it is started (within the 120 hour window). Your caregiver will tell you to take the pills as soon as possible after unprotected sex.

You do not need a prescription for Plan B if you are 17 years old or older. **Do not** use them except if advised by your caregiver. Most women can safely use emergency contraceptive pills, even if they cannot use birth control pills as their regular method of birth control. This is because of the short term use of the hormone.

Emergency contraception pills do not cause an abortion. They work by preventing ovulation (producing an egg) or fertilization of the egg. Taking St. John's Wort, the antibiotic rifampicin and certain anti-convulsion medications may make EC less effective. A pregnancy test or pelvic exam is not necessary before taking EC. Your next menstrual period may occur sooner or later with Plan B.

COPPER-T IUD AS EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

The copper-T intrauterine device (IUD) can be inserted up to 5 days after unprotected intercourse to prevent pregnancy. Insertion of a copper-T IUD is much more effective than use of ECPs or minipills. The IUD reduces the risk of pregnancy following unprotected intercourse by more than 99%. The copper-T IUD can be left in place to provide contraception for up to 10 years.

IUDs are not ideal for all women. Women at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI) may not be good candidates for IUD's. Infection with an IUD can lead to pelvic infection, which can cause infertility if untreated. The risk of pelvic infection from insertion of an IUD is slight among women not at risk of STIs. Women allergic to metals should not use the copper 7 IUD.

SIDE EFFECTS OF EC PILLS:

- Feeling sick to your stomach (*nausea*) and throwing up (*vomiting*).
- Abdominal cramps.
- Headache.
- Dizziness.
- Fluid retention.
- Breast tenderness.
- Tiredness.
- Irregular bleeding and spotting.

WOMEN WHO SHOULD NOT USE EC PILLS

- If you are pregnant.

Tell your caregiver about any medical problems you have.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Eat something before taking the EC pills.
- Ask your caregiver for medication to take before you take the EC pills to prevent nausea or vomiting.
- Lie down for a couple of hours if you become tired or dizzy.
- It is not recommended to use EC pills as a method of birth control.
- Continue using birth control until you start your menstrual period.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You vomited within 2 hours after taking the EC pill. You will have to take another EC pill.
- You need treatment for nausea, vomiting, headache or belly (*abdominal*) cramps.
- You have not had a menstrual period 21 days after taking the EC pills.
- You are having irregular bleeding or spotting.
- You are under 17 years old, sexually active and want a prescription for Plan B so you can get the pills right away if you need them.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have chest pain.
- You have leg pain.
- You have numbness or weakness of your arms or legs.
- You have slurred speech.
- You have visual problems (loss of, blurred or double vision).
- You have been sexually assaulted.
- You are under 17 years old, had unprotected sexual intercourse and need a prescription for Plan B.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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