Emergency Contraception (EC)

What is EC?

Emergency Contraception (EC) is birth control used after unprotected sex to help prevent pregnancy. It works by delaying or temporarily stopping ovulation (the release of an egg that can be fertilized by sperm), or by changing the environment of the uterus or cervix so that sperm and egg do not meet.

EC is best used right away (or up to five days after sex) if you think your birth control failed, you didn’t use contraception, or vaginal intercourse was unplanned, unintended, or unwanted.

How effective is EC?

Pills: EC can reduce the risk of pregnancy by 52 to 100 percent, depending on how soon you take it, the brand, and timing of unprotected sex related to your cycle. If you do not get your period within three weeks of taking EC, a pregnancy test is recommended.

Copper-T IUD: Emergency insertion of a copper IUD up to five days after unprotected sex can reduce the risk of pregnancy by up to 99 percent. Though emergency contraception is an option for up to five days after unprotected sex, it should be used as soon as possible to maximize effectiveness.

What types are available?

Progestin-only pills: Plan B, Plan B One-Step, Next Choice, and Levonorgestrel Tablets are available for sale directly from pharmacists without a prescription.

Ulipristal Acetate pills: Ella is available by prescription only. Research suggests ella is more effective than progestin-only pills when taken around the time of ovulation, on day four or five following unprotected sex, and by heavier women. When taking ella, it’s important to remember:
- Use only once per menstrual cycle.
- If you use hormonal birth control (pills, patch, or ring) restart your birth control 5 days after taking ella and use a back-up method until the end of your cycle.

What is the best choice for me?

- If it has been three days or fewer since unprotected sex and you are of average body weight (BMI under 26)*, over-the-counter EC may be your best option. Progestin EC pills are available at the pharmacy in Cornell Health.
- If it has been four or five days since unprotected sex, prescription EC may be your best option. Call Cornell Health to discuss.
- If you have a BMI of 26 to 35*, a prescription EC may be your best option. Call Cornell Health to discuss.
- If you have concerns beyond the need for EC (e.g., being exposed to a sexually transmitted infection, sex against your will, or

*calcualte your BMI here: nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm

Having EC on-hand “just in case,” can help reduce the stress of a condom break or other contraceptive failure.

- Many health insurance plans allow you to obtain emergency contraception at no cost to you, when you have a prescription. Call Cornell Health if you need a prescription now, or would like to have one on hand.

Copper-T IUD: Intrauterine Devices (IUD) require an appointment with a health care provider for insertion. In addition to EC, an IUD can be used as ongoing contraception for up to 10 years. Though highly effective, they are not appropriate for all women. Your provider will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of using a copper IUD as EC.
are not sure if you need emergency contraception), please speak with a Cornell Health nurse by phone (607-255-5155, available 24/7) or in person.

**Just in case**
State and international laws vary regarding the availability of EC (both prescription and non-prescription). If you will be leaving campus for a considerable period of time (e.g., summer or winter break, going abroad for a semester), plan ahead. You may want to consider purchasing EC pills to have on hand in case of future contraceptive failure or other emergency. Talk to your health care provider about this option during a Well Woman visit or other medical appointment.

**For more information**
- [health.cornell.edu](http://health.cornell.edu) [search “EC”]
- [planbonestep.com/index2.aspx](http://planbonestep.com/index2.aspx)
- [ella-rx.com/](http://ella-rx.com/)
- [not-2-late.com](http://not-2-late.com)