

## How to Use Emergency Contraceptive Pills *Information for the Patient*

Emergency contraceptive pills (ECP) can be used to reduce your risk of getting pregnant if you have had sex without birth control or your birth control method has failed. Some examples of failed birth control methods are: a condom slipping or breaking; missing two or more of your birth control pills in a row, or starting a new package of pills three or more days late; or, a diaphragm being taken out too early or torn. Emergency contraceptive pills can be taken **up to 5 days** (120 hours) after unprotected sex, however the sooner you take ECP, the better. If you have had unprotected sex **more than 5 days ago**, you should talk to your doctor as soon as you can, as you may be able to have an intrauterine device (IUD) inserted to prevent pregnancy. ***It is important to know that ECP is only for emergencies, and should not be used as a regular form of birth control.***

There are two kinds of ECPs that your pharmacist may prescribe for you; both of them contain the same hormones as birth control pills. They are as follows:

**YUZPE Method:** This method consists of 4 Ovral® pills, the first dose is 2 pills taken as soon as possible, and the second dose is 2 pills taken 12 hours after the first dose. This method may cause you to feel nauseous (sick to your stomach) and may make you want to vomit (throw up). For this reason your pharmacist will recommend an anti-nausea medication for you to take **1 hour before** you take your ECP. ***If you vomit within one hour of taking the ECP, contact your pharmacist, as you may need to take more pills.***

**Plan B™:** This method consists of 2 pills which are taken as soon as possible. You do not need to take a second dose. The Plan B™ method causes less nausea and vomiting than the YUZPE method, however it is recommended that you take an anti-nausea medication with this method as well. ***If you vomit within 1 hour of taking these pills, contact your pharmacist, as you may need to take more pills.***

**Do not take any extra pills.** Taking more pills at one time will not make the method work better and will increase the chance of making you vomit.

ECPs work by preventing or delaying the release of an egg from a woman's ovary, preventing fertilization, or changing the uterine lining so that a fertilized egg can't implant. Emergency contraception will not end an existing pregnancy (in other words, ECP does not work as an abortion pill).

### What to Expect

Some women who take ECP will feel sick to their stomach and may vomit. ***Contact your pharmacist if you vomit within one hour of taking ECP.*** Some women may feel dizzy, tired, or may have tender breasts or headaches. These side effects are usually mild and will stop in a day or so.

Your next period should start at about the regular time. Some women who take ECP will get their period a few days early or a few days late

It is important to know that **emergency contraceptive pills are not 100 percent effective.** If you don't get your period **within 3 weeks** after taking ECP, there is a chance you may be pregnant. See your doctor or take a home pregnancy test.

**Emergency contraceptive pills will not prevent a future pregnancy.** Talk to your doctor to decide on a regular form of birth control that will help prevent pregnancy in the future. Use condoms to protect yourself from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

*Adapted with permission from the Canadian Paediatric Society's document "Emergency contraception: Preventing pregnancy after you have had sex," available on the web at [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca) and the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia's document "How to Use Emergency Contraceptive Pills: patient Information," available on the web at [www.bcpharmacists.org](http://www.bcpharmacists.org).*