

What are Emergency Contraception (EC) Pills?

Emergency Contraception Pills (also known as ECPs or Morning-After Pills) are medications that **prevent pregnancy** for women who have had unprotected sex or whose birth control method may have failed. They are intended as a backup contraception to be used in sudden, unexpected situations.

There are two forms of Emergency Contraception Pills approved for use by the FDA:

- Levonorgestrel (Plan B One-Step, My Choice, Option 2, and other generic versions)
- Ulipristal Acetate (Ella).¹

How do EC pills work?

Morning-after pills work by preventing or delaying egg ovulation. Ovulation is when an egg is released from the ovaries during the menstrual cycle. If ovulation doesn't happen, there's no egg available to be fertilized by sperm.²

EC must be taken shortly after unprotected sex because they become less effective over time. Plan B must be taken within 72 hours and Ella must be taken within 120 hours of unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.³

Why do women seek out EC pills?

Women may need to use EC because they forgot to take their birth control pill, they are not using any birth control method, the condom their partner used broke, or they were sexually assaulted and want to prevent pregnancy.

Drug Facts	
Active ingredient	Purpose
Levonorgestrel 1.5 mg.....	Emergency contraceptive
Use for women to reduce chance of pregnancy after unprotected sex (if a contraceptive failed or if you did not use birth control)	
Warnings	
Allergy alert: Do not use if you have ever had an allergic reaction to levonorgestrel	
Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) alert: This product does not protect against HIV/AIDS or other STDs	
Do not use	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ if you are already pregnant (because it will not work) ■ for regular birth control 	
Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking efavirenz (HIV medication) or rifampin (tuberculosis treatment) or medication for seizures (epilepsy). These medications may reduce the effectiveness of levonorgestrel.	
When using this product you may have	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ menstrual changes ■ nausea ■ lower stomach (abdominal) pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ tiredness ■ headache ■ dizziness ■ breast pain ■ vomiting
Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control center right away.	
Directions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ take as soon as possible within 72 hours (3 days) after unprotected sex. The sooner you take it the better it will work. ■ if you vomit within 2 hours after taking the medication, call a healthcare professional to find out if you should repeat the dose 	
Other information ■ read the instructions, warnings and enclosed product leaflet before use	

***Current Drug Facts Included with/Displayed on Plan B Medication*

OTHER EC PILL FAQs

What is the difference between Levonorgestrel (Plan B) and Ulipristal Acetate (Ella) EC pills?

In general, Levonorgestrel (Plan B) is only effective up to 3 days after unprotected sex, is shown to be 89% effective in preventing pregnancy, and is available over-the-counter. It is much less effective for patients with a body weight greater than 165 lbs.

Ulipristal Acetate (Ella) is effective up to 5 days after unprotected sex, is shown to be 95% effective, is only available with a prescription, and it's effectiveness does not change for patients with a body weight between 165–195 lbs.⁴

Do I need a prescription for EC pills?

There's no prescription required to get Levonorgestrel (Plan B) or its generic equivalents. They can be purchased over-the-counter at any HEB, Walgreens, Target, or online retailer (like Amazon).

A prescription is required to get Ulipristal Acetate (Ella).¹

Are EC pills safe?

Large bodies of research show that it is very safe for a majority of women to use the morning-after pill.

There are no known medical conditions for which EC is unsafe.⁵ These medications do not harm future fertility, and there is no delay in the return to fertility after taking EC pills.⁶

Are EC pills effective?

Yes, they reduce the likelihood of pregnancy by 75% to 95%, depending on which type you use, and whether you use them within their recommended timeframes.⁷

Can EC pills harm an existing pregnancy?

No, these medications work by delaying ovulation. Morning-after pills do not harm an existing pregnancy and therefore are ineffective if pregnancy has already occurred.²

REFERENCES

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1 "Morning-after Pill." Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER), 2 July 2024.

2 "Emergency Contraception." ACOG, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Aug. 2019.

3 "Emergency Contraception." 2024 U.S. Selected Practice Recommendations for Contraceptive Use (U.S. SPR), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 19 Nov. 2024.

4 Cieri-Hutcherson, Nicole E, and Stacia Woodcock. Ella vs. Plan B for Emergency Contraception, GoodRx, 7 Sept. 2023.

5 "Emergency Contraception – 'Morning after Pill.'" Yale Health, Yale University.

6 Emergency Contraception, World Health Organization, 9 Nov. 2021.

7 Morning-After Pill, Cleveland Clinic, 21 Nov. 2024.