
▶ **What is the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)?**

The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) is a medication used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. ECP can prevent unplanned pregnancy in the following situations:

- Condom broke or slipped off
- No contraception used
- Missed taking birth control pill(s)
- Failure of other birth control methods
- Late getting Depo shot, applying patch or inserting ring
- You took medication while on the pill, patch or ring that could decrease the effectiveness of that method
- Miscalculation of fertility period
- Non-consensual sex (sexual assault)

▶ **How does it work?**

ECP, (brand name examples are Plan B, Option 2, Next Choice), prevents about three out of four pregnancies.

It works by:

- Preventing or delaying the release of an egg from the ovary (ovulation)
- Preventing the egg from being fertilized by sperm
- Preventing a fertilized egg from attaching to the lining of the uterus.

If you are already pregnant, ECP will not interrupt the pregnancy or harm the fetus.

NOTE: ECP will not protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

▶ **How effective is it?**

ECP works best if taken on the first day after unprotected sex (the sooner the better), but

can be effective for up to five days, although with decreasing effectiveness.

▶ **Where can I get ECP?**

ECP is available in pharmacies without prescription. You can also get ECP from sexual health clinics, walk-in clinics, and your health care provider. The cost varies but you can purchase it in advance and keep it properly stored for an emergency.

▶ **How do I use ECP?**

- Two pills which should be taken at the same time
- If you vomit within one hour of taking pills, the dose should be repeated.
- ECP should not be used as your regular contraceptive and should not be used more than once in a menstrual cycle.

▶ **What are the side effects?**

- Nausea (may be reduced if taken with food)
- Pain in your abdomen
- Headache
- Light bleeding or spotting for a few days

Your next period may be a few days early or late. If it is more than a week late, contact your health care provider about having a pregnancy test.

If pregnancy occurs, there is a risk of tubal pregnancy. If you experience severe abdominal pain, no period, or unexpected vaginal bleeding, dizziness and/or fainting seek medical attention right away.

▶ **What else do I need to know?**

- Health Canada advises that ECP is less effective in women weighing over 165 lbs. (70-80 kg) and not effective if over 176lbs (80Kg)
- You must use backup birth control such as condoms until you start your birth control method, after your next period.
- Consider testing for STIs two weeks after unprotected sex.
- If you are not already on birth control, find a method that works for you.
- Remember to protect yourself from STIs by using a condom every time you have sex.

▶ **Who can you talk to if you have more questions?**

If you have concerns or questions, call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit the health unit website below.



**simcoe
muskoka**
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

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▶ **References:**

[Sexuality and u
SOGC
Government of Canada](#)

Updated August 2015

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