

## EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Emergency contraception consists of a special dose of one of the oral contraceptive pills, and may assist in prevention of pregnancy when intercourse has occurred without contraception. Condom rupture, dislodged diaphragm, sexual assault or missed oral contraceptive pills are some of the reasons emergency contraception may be useful.



### How does it work?

Emergency contraception prevents pregnancy by several ways. If taken before ovulation the pills can prevent or delay ovulation. If taken after ovulation, the pills prevent implantation of a fertilised egg by causing changes to the lining of the uterus.

### How effective are the pills?

The sooner the pills are taken, the more effective they will be. The progesterone only pills, now available in Australia as a prescription item, are the most effective oral emergency contraceptives. In studies they prevent 86% of pregnancies if taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, but this improves to 95% of expected pregnancies if taken within 24 hours of unprotected intercourse. Another option is insertion of an IUD within 5 days of intercourse, which is 99% effective and may be left in place to provide ongoing contraceptive cover.

### What are the possible side effects?



The most common is nausea and vomiting. 23% of women feel nauseous and 5% may vomit. If you vomit within an hour of taking either pill, you will need to see your doctor to get additional pills. You can take anti-nausea tablets with the emergency contraception pills if you are prone to vomiting.

Breast tenderness, headaches, dizziness, cramping and fatigue may occur but generally resolve within 48 hours and do not require treatment.

Ectopic pregnancy- following the use of emergency contraception there is a higher rate of ectopic pregnancy where the fertilised egg implants in a fallopian tube. This causes pain and bleeding and can be a medical emergency. If you get unusual abdominal pain which persists see your doctor urgently.

Irregular bleeding till your next period is common, and menstruation can begin early or later than expected. We recommend that you see a doctor 3 weeks after taking emergency contraception whether or not you have had a period to ensure you are not pregnant.

### Why don't I use this all the time?

Emergency contraceptive pills are not useful to prevent pregnancy routinely as they are less effective and have more side effects than other methods of birth control.