

# EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION (AFTER SEX) – OVERVIEW



Care  
Education  
Advocacy

## What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is a contraceptive method used after sex has occurred. It is used to prevent pregnancy if you had sex with no contraceptive protection. For example, when there is a broken condom, missed or late pills or no contraception used.

The two main types of emergency contraception available in Australia You can choose either the:

- **Emergency contraceptive pill (sometimes called the 'morning after pill')**  
The emergency contraceptive pill (tablet) is available in two types in Australia:
  - o Ulipristal acetate (sold as EllaOne)
  - o Levonorgestrel (multiple brands)
- **Non-hormonal copper intrauterine device (IUD)**  
The non-hormonal copper IUD is a small plastic device with copper wire coiled (wrapped) around the frame. It is inserted into the uterus (womb) where it constantly releases a small amount of copper. There are several different non-hormonal IUDs available in Australia.

## How effective emergency contraception?

Emergency contraceptive pills are around 85% effective at preventing pregnancy. The ulipristal acetate emergency contraceptive pill (EllaOne), is more effective at preventing pregnancy than the levonorgestrel emergency contraceptive pill.

The copper IUD is more than 99% effective at preventing pregnancy and once inserted, can last for up to 5 – 10 years (depending on the type).

## How does emergency contraception work?

The emergency contraceptive pill prevents or delays the ovaries from releasing an egg.

The copper IUD affects the way sperm move and survive in the uterus (womb), stopping sperm from meeting and fertilising an egg. IUDs can also change the lining of the uterus, making it difficult for a fertilised egg to stick to the lining to start a pregnancy.

## How do I use emergency contraception?

The emergency contraceptive pill should be taken (swallowed) as soon as possible after unprotected sex. It can be taken up to 4 or 5 days after unprotected sex, depending on the type of pill you take. Speak to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist for further information. If you have unprotected sex again you may need another dose.

The copper IUD is inserted inside the uterus (womb) by a trained doctor or nurse. If you are using the copper IUD for emergency contraception, you need to use it within 5 days or 120 hours after unprotected sex. Once inserted, it can be left in for 5 – 10 years (depending on the type) and used as an ongoing method of contraception.

## Where can I get emergency contraception?

You can buy the emergency contraceptive pill at a pharmacy. You do not need a script. The price will vary depending on the type of emergency contraceptive pill and the pharmacy.

For the copper IUD, you need a script from your doctor or nurse which you can take to the pharmacy, who will sell you the copper IUD. Sometimes you can buy the IUD from the clinic. You will need to return to the clinic to have the IUD inserted.

## What else should I know about emergency contraception?

- You have the right to choose the type of emergency contraception that is best for you. We recommend you speak with your doctor or nurse for evidence-based information on all contraceptive options so you can make an informed choice based on your personal needs, preferences, and medical suitability.
- Emergency contraception does not protect you from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). If you have had unprotected sex, you may need an STI screen.
- Use of emergency contraception is not an abortion.

