



Emergency Birth Control Consumer Guide

1. What is EBC?

Emergency birth control (EBC) is a safe and effective method of preventing pregnancy following unprotected sexual intercourse. EBC initiated within 72 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse reduces the chance of pregnancy by 89%, decreasing the random chance of pregnancy from 8% to 1% after a single act of unprotected sexual intercourse. It works with the hormones in your body by interfering with fertilization and implantation of the egg.

2. Can I still get pregnant?

Yes. EBC significantly reduces the chance you will get pregnant, but it does not eliminate the possibility. By taking EBC you may be at increased risk of ectopic (tubal) pregnancy, which causes severe abdominal pain and can be life-threatening. You should call Feminist Women's Health Center immediately if you have severe abdominal pain and you should return to Feminist Women's Health Center for a urine pregnancy test (it's free!) in 3 weeks if you have not had a menstrual period since taking EBC.

3. How soon can I take it?

EBC is commonly known as the “morning-after pill,” but that term is misleading; EBC may be taken sooner than the morning after—immediately after unprotected intercourse—or later—for up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected intercourse. **Use of EBC within 3 days (72 hours) of unprotected intercourse is the best way to ensure that you do not get pregnant.** More recent studies indicate that the pills continue to be moderately effective if started between 72 and 120 hours of unprotected intercourse.

4. What is Plan B ®?

The FDA has approved one dedicated emergency contraception product, Plan B ® which is available at pharmacies and clinics in a 2-pill package. The pills contain hormones that work in your body to stop the egg from being fertilized and/or implanted. The FDA has stated that several brands of Norgestrel or Levonorgestrel containing combined oral contraceptives (OC) are safe and effective for use as EBC as well (see the chart below).

5. Is EBC safe?

There have been no reports of long or short-term health risks associated with EBC use. EBC will not end a pregnancy that has already started and no significant effects on fetal development have been reported or linked with women who take EBC. Therefore, pregnancy is a contraindication to EBC use not because of the risk of fetal harm, but because it will not work in the event of a pre-existing pregnancy.

6. What are the side effects?

The most common side effect is nausea. Plan B® (because it is Levonorgestrel-only) is not likely to cause nausea; nausea and vomiting is much more common with the estrogen and progestin combined pills. To reduce the risk of vomiting the pills, you should have something to eat before taking the pills and you may want to take an over the counter anti-nausea medication (such as Dramamine) before you take the EBC pills.

Repeat dose if either pill is vomited within 1 hour of swallowing,

Side effects vary widely from woman to woman, are similar to pre-menstrual type symptoms and depend largely on where you are in your menstrual cycle when the EBC is taken. Some women will experience irregular bleeding or spotting, breast tenderness, cramping, dizziness, headache, backache and a menstrual period that is either a few days early or a few days late. Please call if you have any questions about whether a side effect is normal.

There are other more serious side effects associated with the estrogen and progestin combined method of EBC (Yuzpe method). These side effects are the same ones associated with birth control pills (blood clots, stroke, allergic reaction, etc). All women with: undiagnosed vaginal bleeding, migraines, high blood pressure, blood clots, cardiac disease or liver disease should be screened and carefully evaluated by a licensed health care provider prior to being given any form of medication.

7. What else should I know?

- You may resume use of your normal birth control method immediately; you should use it consistently until your menstrual period resumes.
- **You are not protected from pregnancy if repeated acts of unprotected intercourse occur after EBC use.** You will need to take another dose of EBC to protect yourself in the event of a separate contraceptive failure.
- Repeated use of EBC is not as effective in preventing pregnancies as many other contraceptive methods so ask a health educator about a more reliable contraceptive method if you need one.
- **Either call or return to the Feminist Women's Health Center immediately if abdominal pain or abnormal bleeding occurs within a month of taking EBC.** It is necessary to rule out ectopic pregnancy and you must seek emergency care immediately if such a pregnancy is suspected.
- Call or return to the Feminist Women's Health Center clinic in 3 weeks if your period has not started. In 75-85% of cases, menses onset after EBC is within seven days of when normally expected.

8. How do I take EBC?

• **Plan B® (Levonorgestrel-only method)** – Take both pills at the same time, or in a divided dose 12 hours apart for a total treatment dose of 1.5mg levonorgestrel. The package inserts says to take the pills 12 hours apart, but new studies show that it is slightly more effective when both pills are taken at the same time.

• **Yuzpe method** –combination oral contraceptives containing a total treatment dose of at least 200 mcg of ethinyl estradiol and 1mg levonorgestrel or 2mg norgestrel. The FDA has stated that the following combined oral contraceptives are safe and effective for use as EBC: Ovral, Lo-Ovral, Nordette, Levlen, Levora, Triphasil, Tri-Levlen, Trivora, Alesse, and Levlite. Taken in 2 doses 12 hours apart, and initiated within 72 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse, use of the Yuzpe method reduces the chance of pregnancy by 75%, decreasing the rate of pregnancy from 8% to 2% after a single act of unprotected sexual intercourse.

See chart below to determine which pills to take, how many and when:

Oral Contraceptives used for EBC / Progestin-Estrogen Combined (Yuzpe method) <i>Note: in 28-day packs, only the first 21 pills can be used</i>	
Contraceptive	Directions
Ovral Ogestrel	Take 2 pills within 120 hours after unprotected sex and take 2 more pills 12 hours later:
Cryselle Nordette Levlen Portia Levora Seasonale Lo/Ovral Seasonique Low-Ogestrel	Take 4 pills within 120 hours after unprotected sex and take 4 more pills 12 hours later:
Alesse Levlite Aviane Lutera Lessina	Take 5 pills within 120 hours after unprotected sex and take 5 more pills 12 hours later:

For more information, contact the Feminist Women's Health Center (FWHC)

Cliff Valley Clinic * Division of Reproductive Medicine
 1924 Cliff Valley Way, Atlanta, GA 30329
 Clinic: 404.748.7900 or TollFree 800.877.6013

or visit our website at: www.FeministCenter.org