your guide to emergency contraception

Helping you choose the method of contraception that is best for you
Emergency contraception

If you have had unprotected sex, that is, sex without using contraception, or think your contraception might have failed, you can use emergency contraception. There are different types of emergency contraception:

- the emergency contraceptive pill, Levonelle
- the emergency contraceptive pill, ellaOne
- the emergency intrauterine device (IUD).

Emergency contraception can be very effective especially if you have an IUD fitted or if the emergency contraceptive pill is taken soon after sex. You don’t need to use emergency contraception for the first 21 days after giving birth.

Does emergency contraception cause an abortion?

No. Emergency contraception may stop ovulation, fertilisation of an egg, or a fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus (womb). Medical research and legal judgement are quite clear that emergency contraception prevents pregnancy and is not abortion. Abortion can only take place after a fertilised egg has implanted in the uterus.

Where can I get emergency contraception?

You can get emergency contraception free from these places, but they may not all supply ellaOne or fit the IUD.

- Any general practice that provides contraceptive services.
- A contraception clinic.
- Any young person’s service or Brook clinic.
- Any sexual health clinic.
- Some genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics.

You can also get Levonelle free from:

- most NHS walk-in centres (in England only)
- most pharmacies (there may be age restrictions)
- most NHS minor injuries units
- some hospital accident and emergency departments (phone first to check).

You can buy Levonelle from:

- most pharmacists if you are 16 years old or over
- some fee-paying clinics.

Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about getting emergency pills in advance, just in case you need them.

How do I buy Levonelle from a pharmacist?

It will cost around £25. The pharmacist may not be able to sell it to you, for example if:

- it has been more than 72 hours since you had unprotected sex.
- you have had unprotected sex more than once in the menstrual cycle.
- you think that you might already be pregnant.
- you are taking certain prescribed or complementary medicines.
- you have certain health conditions.

In these circumstances you will need to see a doctor or nurse. All the advice and treatment you receive is confidential – wherever you receive it.

Can someone else get the emergency contraceptive pill for me?

Someone else will only be given Levonelle on your behalf in exceptional circumstances. You will need to visit the doctor yourself to be prescribed ellaOne.

How will I know if my emergency contraception has worked?

It is unlikely that you will be pregnant, but do a pregnancy test to make sure you are not pregnant if:

- you feel pregnant
- you have not had a normal period within three weeks of taking Levonelle, ellaOne or having the emergency IUD inserted
- you do not have a bleed when you have the seven day break from using the combined pill, contraceptive patch or the contraceptive vaginal ring, or when you take the placebo tablets with EveryDay combined pills.

A pregnancy test will be accurate if the test is done three weeks after the last time you had unprotected sex.

Am I protected from future pregnancy?

Levonelle and ellaOne will not protect you from pregnancy if you have unprotected sex again. Seek advice – you can take Levonelle as many times as you need to in any menstrual cycle, ellaOne cannot be used more than once in the same menstrual cycle or in the same cycle at taking Levonelle. You can continue to use the IUD as your long-term contraceptive method.

Emergency contraception is not as effective as using other methods of contraception regularly – seek advice on using other methods.

How do I find out about contraception services?

The Sexual Health Information Line provides confidential advice and information on all aspects of sexual health. The number is 0800 567 123 and the service is available from Monday to Friday from 9am-8pm and at weekends from 11am-4pm. For additional information on sexual health visit www.fpa.org.uk. Information for young people can be found at www.brook.org.uk.

Clinics

To locate your closest clinic you can:

- Use Find a Clinic at www.fpa.org.uk/clinics
- Download FPA’s Find a Clinic app for iPhone or Android


Sexually transmitted infections

Most methods of contraception do not protect you from sexually transmitted infections. Male and female condoms, when used correctly and consistently, can help protect against sexually transmitted infections. If you can, avoid using spermicidally lubricated condoms. The spermicide commonly contains a chemical called Nonoxindol 9, which does not protect against HIV and may even increase the risk of infection.

Male and female condoms, when used correctly and consistently, can help protect against sexually transmitted infections. If you can, avoid using spermicidally lubricated condoms. The spermicide commonly contains a chemical called Nonoxindol 9, which does not protect against HIV and may even increase the risk of infection.
**Emergency IUD**

You will give our pill to take it should be taken seven days

**What is it?**

Most women can use Levonelle. However, if you are being unsuitable to take emergency contraceptive medicine, you will be advised and the dose of Levonelle may need to be decreased. emergency IUD may be preferred. Levonelle can be used day 21 after giving birth. You can use it after miscarriage or abortion.

**Who can use it?**

There are no serious short or long-term side-effects. You may have some irregular bleeding between taking Levonelle and your next period. This can range from spotting to being quite heavy. You are worried that you might have a sexually transmitted infection.

**What are the disadvantages of the next period?**

Your period is likely to come on time a few days or 120 hours after taking it. Sometimes it will be a week late.

**How will it affect my next period?**

If it cannot be fitted immediately you may be offered antibiotics when you have the IUD fitted.

**Can it fail?**

You may be able to use the emergency IUD after a miscarriage or abortion. Speak to a doctor or nurse. You may be offered antibiotics when you have the IUD fitted.

**Will it affect my next period?**

Some women get pregnant even though they took Levonelle before you have your next period. This means it is not common but the IUD can be pushed out or moved. There is also a very small risk that it might not go through your uterus.

**What will it affect my next period?**

If you vomit later than two hours after taking Levonelle, the IUD has been expelled successfully.

**Can I continue to use other contraception?**

If you forgot your regular pill or did not use the patch or vaginal ring correctly for more than seven days, Levonelle will have been absorbed.

**Can I continue to use other contraception?**

If you forgot your regular pill or did not use the patch after applying it you may have an infection and you may be offered antibiotics when you have the IUD fitted.

The pill is a small plastic and copper device. It is inserted in your uterus 24 to 72 hours after you have had unprotected sex and within five days (120 hours) of having unprotected sex. Avoid breastfeeding for one week after taking ellaOne.

**Are the pills the same?**

You may be offered antibiotics when you have the IUD fitted.

**When can I use the emergency IUD?**

Some women get pregnant even though they took Levonelle after a miscarriage or abortion. They may give you another dose or suggest an emergency IUD if you vomit later than three hours after taking ellaOne.

**Is the emergency IUD effective?**

The IUD is very effective but if it fails there is a small increased risk of an ectopic pregnancy. The risk is less in women using IUD than in women using contraception at all times before as possible.
A final word

This booklet can only give you general information. The information is based on evidence-guided research from the World Health Organisation and The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

All methods of contraception come with a Patient Information Leaflet which provides detailed information about the method. Remember - contact your doctor, practice nurse or a sexual health clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.