

Emergency Contraception



Prevention of conception following an unprotected sexual intercourse is called emergency contraception. This is a method to be used by women. Use of emergency contraception reduces the chances of an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. Thus, the need for induced abortion and subsequent adverse health effects are reduced.



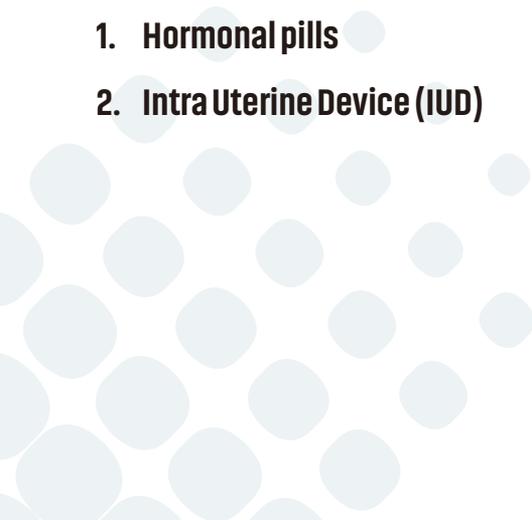
Who can use this method and when

- This method can be used when one wants to prevent pregnancy after an unprotected intercourse.
- However, one should not forget that this is an emergency method, to be used only occasionally when one has not been able to use other regular contraceptive methods.
- Emergency contraception can be used even by those regularly using a method of contraception in the event of a user or method failure e.g. if there is a breakage or tear of male or female condoms during intercourse, when there has been an error in calculating the safe period when using natural methods, when one has forgotten oral pills, or when one realizes after sexual intercourse that a diaphragm was not fitted properly or has been displaced or torn.
- Emergency contraception also helps prevent pregnancy following non-consensual sexual intercourse or rape. In many countries, it is routinely given by health care providers examining a woman following sexual violence.

Currently, two types of emergency contraceptive methods are available.

1. Hormonal pills

2. Intra Uterine Device (IUD)



Hormonal pills

These hormonal pills are of two types.

1. Levonorgestrel is a pill that is used exclusively as an emergency contraceptive pill. This pill contains only progestin hormone.
2. Regular contraceptive pills like Mala N taken in a higher dosage. These contain a combination of estrogen and progesterone.

How to use

The following table depicts how these tablets can be used.

Pill Names	Dosage and time duration	
	First dose	Second dose
Levonorgestrel 0.75mg	⊘ ⊘ Two tablets to be taken at the same time within 5 days after unprotected intercourse	Not required
Levonorgestrel 0.75mg	⊘ One tablet within 5 days after unprotected intercourse	⊘ Another tablet 12 hours later.
Mala-N	⊘ ⊘ ⊘ ⊘ Four tablets to be taken at the same time within 5 days after unprotected intercourse	⊘ ⊘ ⊘ ⊘ After 12 hours following the first dose, an additional four pills to be taken

The emergency contraceptive pills have to be used within five days following unprotected sexual intercourse. The sooner they are used after sexual intercourse, the more effective they are in preventing pregnancy.

The woman is at risk of pregnancy if she has unprotected sexual intercourse even on the day after taking the emergency contraceptive pills, so an alternative contraceptive method needs to be used.

How it works

- It either prevents or delays the release of the egg from the ovary.
- It prevents the egg and sperm from meeting each other in the fallopian tubes by reducing the speed of their movement.
- Emergency pills do not affect an already established pregnancy.

Benefits

- It is easily available. It is easy to use and effective.
- There is no need for medical opinion before use.

After consuming the pills

- The subsequent menstrual period may start either a few days earlier or later, and the bleeding could be slightly less or more than usual.
- If the next period is delayed by more than 7 days, it is advisable to seek medical attention to diagnose a possible pregnancy.

Adverse effects

- Some women experience giddiness and nausea after the use of emergency pills. A glass of milk with biscuits half an hour before consuming the pills helps. Anti-vomiting medication like domperidone / metaclopramide taken one hour before the emergency pills also helps.
- Some women may experience heaviness in the breasts and headaches. These usually resolve within a day or two.
- There is a belief that these tablets could cause infertility or lead to cancer. There is no medical basis to support this.

It is advisable not to use emergency pills in place of a regular contraceptive method. While there is no evidence that frequent use of emergency pills leads to any long-term side effects, they may not be as effective as regular contraceptive methods.

Intra Uterine Device (IUD)/Copper-T

Pregnancy following an unprotected intercourse can be prevented by inserting Copper-T 380A within five days following the intercourse. Commonly, Copper-T is used to give adequate space between pregnancies. The same Copper-T, when inserted within 5 days of an intercourse, is effective as an emergency contraceptive method. Women who desire a long-term method of contraception can have a Copper-T inserted within 120 hours or 5 days following an intercourse. Copper-T 380A is effective for ten years following insertion.

How does it work?

- It prevents the meeting of the sperm and the egg.
- It prevents the fertilized egg from attaching itself to the uterus.

Copper-T insertion is done at both government health facilities and private facilities.

For more information on IUD/Copper-T, please refer to the relevant pamphlet.

A note of caution

- **Emergency contraceptive pills do not cause abortion. They are not effective if the woman is already pregnant. They should not be used instead of the abortion pill.**
- **Emergency contraceptive pills are best used only as an emergency measure following unprotected sexual intercourse. It is not advisable to use them instead of a regular ongoing method.**



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