

Emergency Hormonal Contraception

Patient information

What is EHC?

Emergency hormonal contraception (EHC), also known as “the morning after pill”, is a birth control method containing the female-type hormone called levonorgestrel.

EHC should be used only on an **occasional basis** and in the following emergency situations:

- when regular contraceptives have failed or have not been used appropriately, or
- after unprotected intercourse.

This treatment will not protect you against sexually transmitted diseases.

How does EHC work?

Levonorgestrel works differently depending on the moment of the menstrual cycle, it can prevent pregnancy by:

- Preventing or delaying ovulation
- Preventing the egg's fertilization by the sperm.
- Preventing the egg's implantation in the uterus (womb).
- Preventing the egg's transport from the ovary to the uterus.



Where can you find EHC?

In Catalonia, EHC is dispensed free of charge at:

- Primary care practices (CAP);
- Sexual Health and family planning clinics (ASSIR);
- Hospital emergency departments

It can also be purchased over the counter (no prescription required) from your chemist for approximately 20 €.

How should you take EHC?



A single dose of levonorgestrel 1.500 micrograms should be taken as soon as possible and always within 72 hours (3 days) following unprotected sexual intercourse. Generally it is better tolerated

if taken with food and can be taken at any time during the menstrual cycle, regardless of the timing of your last period or

How effective is EHC?

It is estimated that one levonorgestrel 1500mg pill taken within 72h following unprotected sexual intercourse, could **prevent 84% of expected pregnancies**. Optimal results can be expected when EHC is taken within the first 24h.

What should I know before taking EHC?

- EHC has not demonstrated its efficacy when taken 72h after unprotected intercourse.
- If you think there is a chance that you **could already be pregnant** you should see your doctor.
- Special precautions should be taken if you suffer any **disease that affects your bowel, kidney or liver** or if you have experienced previous allergy to this medicine.
- Certain medicines (and herbal remedies) **can reduce EHC efficacy**. You should be especially careful if you are currently taking antibiotics, medicines for controlling epilepsy or Saint John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*).



What should I know after taking EHC?

- Common adverse side effects include:
 - nausea and vomiting,
 - light haemorrhages (bleeding) or spotting
- Regular use of EHC can alter your menstrual cycle, therefore occasional use is recommended.
- You must continue to use your regular contraceptive method as this treatment will not protect you against pregnancy during the rest of the menstrual cycle.
- If within three weeks (21 days) you have not had your period you should have a pregnancy test.



What should I do if vomiting occurs?

If you vomit within three hours after taking the pill, you should treat the vomiting and then take a second EHC pill. If you vomit within 3 hours of the second dose you should seek advice from a healthcare professional.

Are follow up visits to the GP required?

- A routine follow-up visit is not required.
- If you feel **lower abdominal pain** you should refer to your doctor promptly.
- If your next **period is light, unusual in anyway or more than 3-5 days late** you advised to visit your GP approximately three weeks after taking EHC.



- Key Issues**
- EHC should be taken as soon as possible and always within 72 h after unprotected sexual intercourse.
 - EHC should not be used as a regular contraceptive method.
 - EHC will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or offer protection against pregnancy for the rest of your cycle.
 - Your GP and other healthcare professionals can offer you information on contraceptive methods available.
 - If you have any queries regarding this or other treatments you can call **Sanitat Respon (902 111 444)** 24 hours 365 days
 - For further information, please refer to the following web pages:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/007014.htm>

<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/women/contraceptive/805.html>

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Emergency-Contraception.htm>

<http://ec.princeton.edu/>

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