



Emergency Contraception

Choosing a Method of Contraception

This is one of our series of leaflets that outlines some of the different methods of contraception available and gives you information about the advantages and disadvantages of each. Leaflets in this series include:

The Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill
The Mini Pill
Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices
Emergency Contraception
Implants and Injectable Contraception

We have also produced information leaflets on:

Safe Sex and Sexually Transmitted Infections
Prepregnancy Advice

Our leaflets are designed to give an overview of the various topics. We also stock more detailed information leaflets on a wide range of women's health issues.



Clinics

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Emergency Contraception



Emergency Contraception is prescribed for women where there is a risk of pregnancy occurring, i.e. that unprotected sex took place near the estimated date of ovulation. However, many women will not have regular menstrual cycles or will not be aware of their ovulation patterns. Therefore it is advisable to use Emergency Contraception if unprotected sex has occurred regardless of where you are in the menstrual cycle.

MORNING AFTER PILL

The Morning After Pill consists of 1 pill that contains a hormone similar to one of the hormones (progestogen) in the contraceptive pill. This must be taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. The earlier the pill is taken, the more effective it is. Minor side effects such as nausea and breast tenderness may occur but they settle within about 24 hours.

This form of emergency contraception is suitable for almost everyone

How does the Morning After Pill work?

- Ovulation (release of an egg) may be delayed.
- Slows down the passage of the egg through the fallopian tube.
- Slows down the passage of sperm.
- Creates hormone changes in the lining of the womb so that a fertilised egg cannot attach itself and passes unnoticed out of the body in the menstrual flow.

Failure rate is less than 5%.

What are the possible risks?

Since there has been little or no research into the possible effects of the Morning After Pill on a pregnancy should the treatment fail, medical opinion remains uncertain as to the risk of foetal abnormalities in such circumstances. Evidence from studies done on the Contraceptive Pill has been put forward to suggest a possible risk of congenital heart defects and limb deformities when women continue to take the Pill while pregnant. On present evidence, several bodies such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the World Health Organisation have expressed the view that an increased risk of foetal abnormalities has not been proven.

- Remember, It is only effective for one episode of unprotected sex per cycle.

This is just an outline. All packets of pills carry instructions and details of side effects. If you have any questions or worries, telephone or visit us at The Well Woman Centre.

MORNING AFTER COIL

The Morning After Coil is a coil that contains copper.

- The Coil is suitable for women who are too late for the Pill and it may be inserted up to 5 days after unprotected sex.

How does the Morning After Coil work?

If the coil is inserted into the womb within 5 days of unprotected sex, it can slow down the movement of sperm preventing fertilisation. If fertilisation does occur, the presence of the coil can stop the implantation of a fertilised egg.

What are the advantages?

- Many studies show no failures.
- Women who have had children can keep it in for future birth control.

What are the disadvantages?

- Insertion can be painful and unsuccessful.
- There can be heavy bleeding and cramping after insertion.
- There is a risk of pelvic infection - especially if the coil is left in for future birth control.
- It is unsuitable for women who have had vaginal infections in the recent past.
- It is unsuitable in a small number of other instances - this can be discussed with the nurse and doctor.