



# the morning-after pill

by Vicki L. Dihle, PA-C

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So, you had  
unprotected sex,  
and thoughts are  
racing through  
your head . . .

*What if I'm pregnant?  
What if he has an STD and  
gave it to me? What if . . . ?*

The “what if” questions  
can be scary.

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You've probably heard about the morning-after pill. Some call it “emergency contraception.” Now you need more information—and soon, because one of your “what ifs”—*pregnancy*—is a real possibility.

## What is the morning-after pill?

- It's a drug intended to be taken as soon as possible within the first 72 hours after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.
- It contains a high dose of a progesterone (levonorgestrel), which is found in many kinds of birth control pills.
- At the dosage found in the morning-after pill, this drug may work on rare occasions to prevent an embryo from implanting in the uterus.<sup>1</sup>
- It is often referred to by the brand name that started it all—Plan B®.

### *You should know . . .*

*In 2009, Plan B® was reformulated and renamed Plan B® One-Step. It is now taken as a single-dose tablet. A two-dose generic form is also available.<sup>2</sup>*

## How does it work?

Depending on where you are in your menstrual cycle, the pill could affect you in one of three ways:

1. It may prevent ovulation: The egg will not be released to meet the sperm—so fertilization, sometimes known as conception, can't occur.
2. It may affect the lining of your fallopian tubes so that sperm cannot reach the egg. This also prevents fertilization.
3. It may irritate the lining of your uterus. If an egg has already been released and fertilized by the sperm, this irritation could make it harder for the embryo to implant in your uterus.<sup>3</sup>

## Are there side effects?

Yes. You may experience several short-term side effects when taking the morning-after pill. These include:

- nausea and vomiting
- irregular and unpredictable menstrual periods
- cramping and abdominal pain—which might also be the sign of an “ectopic pregnancy” (see next question)
- fatigue
- headache
- dizziness
- breast tenderness<sup>4</sup>

### *You should know . . .*

*The cramping and abdominal pain that may result from the use of the morning-after pill can mask the symptoms of an ectopic pregnancy, which requires emergency care.*

## What is an ectopic pregnancy? And why does it matter?

- This is a potentially life-threatening condition in which a fertilized egg implants outside of the uterus—most often in the fallopian tubes.
- The morning-after pill won't end an ectopic pregnancy.
- If you have severe abdominal pain three to five weeks after using the morning-after pill, see your health care professional to rule out an ectopic pregnancy.
- An embryo growing in a fallopian tube will require emergency care.<sup>5</sup>



*You should know . . .*

*After the sperm penetrates and fertilizes the egg, 46 human chromosomes come together in a one-of-a-kind genetic design that determines a person's eye and hair color, gender, skin tone, height and even the intricate swirl of the fingerprints.*

## What happens if I use emergency contraception after fertilization?

- The high dose of levonorgestrel found in the morning-after pill may irritate the lining of your uterus.
- That irritation may keep the embryo inside you from implanting, ending its life.
- If this happens, an abortion will occur, because each human life begins as an embryo.<sup>6</sup>

## So, how can I know if an egg has been fertilized?

- That's the problem—you can't know.
- But we do know that sperm can reach the fallopian tubes mere minutes after intercourse<sup>7</sup>; and if an egg has already been released, fertilization could occur.
- So, there is a possibility that by the time you wake up on the “morning after,” a new human life may have already begun.
- If that's the case, using emergency contraception might cause a very early abortion.

*You should know . . .*

*The morning-after pill can't guarantee that you won't get pregnant, nor does it protect you from HIV/AIDS or other sexually-transmitted infections or diseases.*

Think carefully before you use emergency contraception, and make sure you understand the side effects and risks.

End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> FDA Prescribing and Label Information for Plan B® One-Step; Rev. July 2009; pp. 13-14; [www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda\\_docs/label/2009/021998lbl.pdf](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2009/021998lbl.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Watson Pharmaceuticals Receives FDA Approval for Generic PLAN B® for Over-the-Counter Use; August 28, 2009; <http://ir.watson.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=65778&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1325302>

<sup>3</sup> FDA Prescribing and Label Information for Plan B® One-Step; Rev. July 2009; p. 13; See footnote 1.

<sup>4</sup> FDA Prescribing and Label Information for Plan B® One-Step; Rev. July 2009; p. 3; See footnote 1.

<sup>5</sup> FDA Prescribing and Label Information for Plan B® One-Step; Rev. July 2009; p. 6 and 17; See footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> Keith L. Moore and T.V.N. Persaud. *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 6th Edition (Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 1998), pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> L. Speroff and M.A. Fritz. *Clinical Gynecological Endocrinology and Infertility*, 7th Edition (Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2005), p. 235.

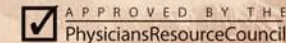


## Do you know the difference?

*Sometimes, these pills get confused.*

The Abortion Pill:	The Morning-After Pill:
An abortion method used to terminate an early pregnancy	A method used to prevent pregnancy. It may cause a very early abortion if fertilization has already occurred.
Medications are Mifeprex® (mifepristone) and Cytotec® (misoprostol).	Medication is Plan B® One-Step (levonorgestrel).
Must be taken within 49 days of when your last menstrual period began	Must be taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex
Pills must be prescribed by a health care professional. At least three visits to your provider are needed, possibly more.	Depending on one's age, the pill may be purchased without a prescription.
Will not prevent sexually transmitted infections or diseases	Will not prevent sexually transmitted infections or diseases

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