

## What is Contraception?

Contraception refers to the range of methods and devices which can prevent pregnancy. Contraception is sometimes called 'Birth Control' – you may also come across the term 'Family Planning', which refers to the range of individual and social strategies involved in planning when to have children, and how many children to have. Contraception will not necessarily protect you from sexually transmitted infections!

## What is '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, and this will reduce the risk of becoming pregnant. It will not protect you from sexually transmitted infections!

## Are there different types of emergency contraception?

There are three different types of emergency protection generally available in the UK.

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

## How do they work?

Emergency contraception can work in different ways; it can stop an egg from maturing (ovulation), or being fertilised, or from implanting in the uterus (womb).

**Emergency Contraception is not a form of abortion;** Medical research and legal judgement are quite clear on this point! Emergency contraception prevents pregnancy and is not abortion. Abortion can only take place after a fertilised egg has implanted in the uterus.

Levonelle is a tablet containing a hormone called progestogen. It works by stopping eggs from maturing, making it more difficult for them to be fertilised, and preventing fertilised eggs from implanting in the womb

ellaOne is a tablet which contains ulipristal acetate. This affects the way your body reacts to the hormone progestogen and works by stopping eggs from maturing, making it more difficult for them to be fertilised, and preventing fertilised eggs from implanting in the womb.

Both Levonelle and ellaOne are sometimes called 'the morning after pill'.

An IUD is a small plastic and copper device that is fitted in your uterus; it prevents a fertilised egg from implanting in the womb.

## When do I take them?

Emergency Contraception is most effective if taken as soon as possible after having unprotected sex. Levonelle (one pill) should be taken within three days (72 hours) of having unprotected sex.

Ellaone (one pill) should be taken within five days (120 hours) of having unprotected sex

An IUD can be fitted up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected sex or within five days of the earliest time you could have released an egg and is the most effective method to prevent unplanned pregnancy. It takes about 15–20 minutes to fit. It can be uncomfortable – you can ask for

a local anaesthetic. (If it cannot be fitted immediately you may be advised to take Levonelle or ellaOne.)

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 as taking Levonelle.

You can continue to use the IUD as your long-term contraceptive method.

### **What methods can I use?**

#### **Who can use Levonelle?**

Most women can use Levonelle. However, if you are taking certain prescribed medicines, or complementary medicines, you will need advice and the dose of Levonelle may need to be increased. The emergency IUD may be preferred. Levonelle can be used from day 21 after giving birth. You can use it after a miscarriage or abortion.

#### **Who can use ellaOne?**

Most women can use ellaOne. If you have liver disease, severe asthma or take certain prescribed medicines or complementary medicines, an emergency IUD may be a preferred option. Avoid breastfeeding for one week after taking ellaOne.

#### **Who can use an emergency IUD?**

Most women can use an emergency IUD but it is not normally recommended before 28 days after giving birth. If you need to, you can use Levonelle or ellaOne until this time.

### **How reliable is it?**

#### **How reliable is Levonelle?**

Some women get pregnant even though Levonelle was taken correctly. You may also become pregnant if you delay taking it, have further unprotected sex or vomit within two hours of taking it. Speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you are worried. They may give you another dose or suggest an emergency IUD. If you vomit later than two hours, Levonelle will have been absorbed.

#### **How reliable is ellaOne?**

Some women get pregnant even though they took ellaOne correctly. You may also become pregnant if you vomit within three hours of taking it. Speak to your doctor or nurse. They may give you another dose or suggest an emergency IUD. If you vomit later than three hours ellaOne will have been absorbed.

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 as taking Levonelle.

#### **How reliable is an emergency IUD?**

Emergency IUDs are extremely reliable. However, if you cannot feel the IUD threads in the top of your vagina, or you can feel the IUD itself, you may not be protected against pregnancy. See your doctor or nurse straightaway and use additional contraception.

## Does it have any side effects?

### Levonelle

Levonelle has no serious short- or long-term side-effects. However

- Some women may feel sick, dizzy or tired, or may get headaches, breast tenderness or abdominal pain.
- A very small number will vomit.
- It may alter your next period.

Most side-effects go away within a few days. Your period is likely to come on time or a few days early or late. Sometimes it can be a week late and sometimes even later. You may have some irregular bleeding between taking Levonelle and your next period. This can range from spotting to being quite heavy.

**If your next period is more than seven days late, it is shorter or lighter than usual or you have any sudden or unusual pain in your lower abdomen. These could be signs of an ectopic pregnancy. Although this is not common, it is very serious, so you need to see a doctor at once.**

### ellaOne

Some women may get the same side-effects as for Levonelle above. They may also get:

- painful periods
- mood swings
- muscle and back pain.

Most side-effects go away within a few days. Some women may get a period-type pain and light bleeding for a few days after the IUD is fitted. Pain relief can help.

**If your next period is more than seven days late, it is shorter or lighter than usual or you have any sudden or unusual pain in your lower abdomen. These could be signs of an ectopic pregnancy. Although this is not common, it is very serious, so you need to see a doctor at once.**

### Emergency IUD

Some women may get a period-type pain and light bleeding for a few days after the IUD is fitted. Pain relief can help. There is a very small chance of getting an infection during the first 20 days after it is fitted. If you already have an infection you may be given antibiotics. It is not common but the IUD can be pushed out or it can move. There is also a very small risk that it might go through your uterus.

### Is it free?

**YES it is FREE!** 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 get Levonelle free from:

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

**You can also get the emergency pill FREE from many pharmacies. This is available to women of all ages (including under 16).**

Most pharmacies can provide Emergency Contraception when an accredited pharmacist is on the premises. Please check with the pharmacy that they have an accredited pharmacist available by phoning before you attend. This scheme is expanding and more local pharmacies are providing this service, so you should also check with your local pharmacy and other large pharmacies found around the city centre.

### **Where can I get it?**

You can buy Levonelle from:

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

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

- 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.**

*Reviewed 23/06/2015 AN*