

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid About 40 percent of American women become pregnant before the age of 20. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998)

Q. I recently had a pregnancy scare. How does the morning after pill work and where can I get it? How is it different from the abortion pill? What is its success rate?

A. The “morning after” pill is called Emergency Contraception (EC). There are currently two drugs on the market – Preven® and Plan B®. Preven is actually two pills of progestin (synthetic hormone), while Plan B contains a combination of two different hormones.

If taken within 96 hours (5 days or less) of unprotected intercourse, EC can prevent implantation of a fertilized egg and prevent pregnancy in 75% of cases. Emergency Contraception is distinctly different from Mifeprex®, the abortion pill that has been widely used in Europe under the name RU-486. The abortion pill causes the contents (embryo or fetus, placenta, etc.) of a pregnant uterus to be expelled. In contrast, EC will not interrupt a pregnancy where the fertilized egg has already implanted into the uterine wall. It will not terminate an existing pregnancy.

Emergency Contraception is available by prescription only, and is prescribed at many local offices and clinics including the UA Campus Health Service. In some states (not Arizona), EC can be obtained without a trip to a medical facility. In Oregon and California, EC can be prescribed by approved pharmacists. It is often prescribed in cases of sexual assault, unplanned sex, or unprotected sex where contraception has failed or not been used - hence the name “emergency”. The cost for EC at the UA Campus Health Service is \$20. Call 621-9202 for an appointment.

While EC is an important option to know about, and can reduce the chance of pregnancy significantly (75%), it is not nearly as effective as regularly taking oral contraceptives. Most hormonal birth control methods (the pill, the patch, Depo-Provera®) are 98-99.5% effective in preventing pregnancy. Therefore, EC should not be relied on as a regular method of birth control.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES & Melissa McGee, Ph.D., MPH, health educators at The University of Arizona Campus Health Service.

