Emergency contraception basic information [1]

Alice,

My boyfriend and I had sex last night and we saw that the condom had broke. We don't know when it happened and I've been looking all over for the 72 hour correction thing that the commercials say—just in case. Can you help me?

K

Answer

Dear K,

It sounds like you're searching for emergency contraception (EC), which can help to prevent a pregnancy if taken after sex that occurred when a birth control method failed or wasn't used. It's most effective if taken within 72 hours after sex, though there is evidence that it's moderately effective at preventing pregnancy for up to 120 hours after sex. Your best bet is to take it as soon as possible for greatest effectiveness.

In the US, one brand of EC, Plan B One-Step, is available on-the-shelf (you don't have to ask a pharmacist) and without age restrictions to women and men without a prescription. This means that anyone can buy it without having to show an ID. Just walk into a drugstore and check the family planning aisle. The cost is usually between $40 and $50, but differs depending on location. There are also generic versions of Plan B One-Step (like My Way and Next Choice One Dose) that are typically cheaper. These will also be available on-the-shelf, without a prescription at a pharmacy or drugstore as well. Though the FDA currently requires the labels of generic EC to say that the product is intended for use in women ages 17 and older, proof-of-age will not be required at the time of purchase. It's a good idea to call the pharmacy or drugstore first to see which types of EC are available. Other methods of EC are available by prescription and/or require a visit to your health care provider like an intra-uterine device (IUD) [2].

If EC is too expensive for you, you may want to find a family planning clinic, like Planned Parenthood [3], that offers it at a reduced rate. In some cities, EC is available for free, 24 hours a day at any public hospital. You might consider getting an extra dose of EC to have on-hand, that way you can have it when you need it and be able to take it as soon as possible.
Best of luck!

Alice!

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