Is repeat use of emergency contraception safe? [1]

Dear Alice,

I just had sex this morning and the condom broke. I want to know whether it’s worth taking emergency contraception if:

   a) I just took emergency contraception around two months ago.
   b) I am supposed to get my period this weekend.

How healthy is emergency contraception or how toxic is it if you take it more than once within two months?

What chances do I have of getting pregnant?

Answer

Dear Reader,

If you took emergency contraception (EC) two months ago, you are not protected for any intercourse you had afterwards. So, if you want to be protected at this point, it may make sense to take EC again. Emergency Contraception offers a second chance to prevent a pregnancy after sex that occurred when a birth control method was not used or failed. Though there are several methods of EC, the brand Plan B One-Step and its generic versions are available on the shelves in the family planning aisle at many pharmacies and drugstores. They are available without a prescription or a proof-of-age requirement (even though the packaging on the generic versions of EC says that it?s intended for use in women ages 17 and older). Other methods of EC may require prescriptions and/or a visit to a health care provider.

EC is a special formulation of hormones used in birth control that is taken within 120 hours of sex to prevent pregnancy. However, it?s most effective when taken as soon as possible. While repeat use of EC has no known health risks, you may already be familiar with temporary side effects when you took them last; some women may have changes in the amount, duration, and timing of their next period, while others may experience nausea and vomiting. EC is not designed to be used as a regular form of contraception; however using EC
twice in a couple of months won’t harm you.

You also ask what your chances are of getting pregnant. Too many variables are involved to accurately predict any woman's chances of becoming pregnant. Based on the information you provided, a couple of influential factors can be considered to help narrow the estimate of your risk of pregnancy. For example, did the sex in question occur during the most fertile days of your cycle? Typically, this period runs from five to six days before ovulation through the day after ovulation, with a 10 to 30 percent chance of becoming pregnant. If you know for sure that you have ovulated, and if the condom broke more than two days after ovulation, you're probably at lower risk for pregnancy. However, given that there is still a small possibility of becoming pregnant; using EC again may be a good idea.

When the condom broke during intercourse is another factor that may decrease or increase your likelihood of becoming pregnant. Did it break before or after your partner ejaculated? Did your partner pull out before or after ejaculating?

It can be helpful to talk with your health care provider about whether you want to take EC again. For more information, check out the related questions below or search through Alice!'s Sexual Health archive.

Best of luck making your decision,

Alice!

Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health
Contraception
Emergency Contraception

Related questions
How to use a condom properly? avoid breakage and slippage!
Fertile times?
How many birth control pills can be taken after unprotected sex for emergency contraception?
Common reasons for condom failure
Emergency contraception basic information
Where can you get the morning after pill?

Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
Published date:
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Mar 21, 2014
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