Emergency contraception

Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy in these situations:

- If a condom bursts, tears or slips off
- If you have not taken your hormonal contraception correctly (missed pills or the vaginal ring or contraceptive patch has not been changed at the correct time)
- If you have had unprotected sexual intercourse (Coitus interruptus/the withdrawal method; or non-consensual sex, for example.)

There are two types of emergency contraception in Switzerland:

1. Hormonal emergency contraception
2. The IUD (intrauterine device or copper coil) as emergency contraception

1. Hormonal emergency contraceptive

This is an oral hormonal tablet, whose main purpose is to delay ovulation.

When should you take it?

It should be taken as soon as possible, but no later than 72 or 120 hours after unprotected sex, depending on the type of emergency contraception used.

Where can you get it from?

- A pharmacy
- Some sexual health and family planning centres
- Your gynecologist or any other doctor

What do you need to know about hormonal emergency contraception?

- If you have further unprotected sex, hormonal emergency contraception taken beforehand will not prevent a pregnancy. It is therefore necessary to use effective contraception such as a condom after taking it.
- Hormonal emergency contraception is not a substitute for regular contraception (for example, condoms or hormonal contraception).
- It is not a method of terminating a pregnancy. If you are already pregnant, it has no effect.
- You can use hormonal emergency contraception if you are breastfeeding.
- If you vomit within 3 hours of taking the tablet, talk to the person who gave you the emergency contraception or go to a duty pharmacy.

2. The copper intrauterine contraceptive device (copper IUD/copper coil) as emergency contraception

The copper IUD can be inserted into the uterus (womb) by a doctor as emergency contraception. The IUD is a small device made of soft plastic surrounded by a thin copper wire. The copper acts on the sperm, preventing the egg from being fertilised and also modifies the uterine lining, preventing the fertilised egg from implanting there.

When should it be fitted?
Within 5 days (120 hours) of unprotected sexual intercourse.

Where can it be fitted?

- At a hospital emergency department
- By your gynaecologist or a doctor who is trained to fit IUDs
- At a Sexual Health and Family Planning Counselling Center where there are medical staff (only a doctor can insert the coil)

What should I know about the copper IUD?

- It is the most effective emergency contraception.
- The IUD can be used as a means of contraception for several years after it has been fitted. It has no effect on the woman's natural cycle.

How will I know if the emergency contraception has been effective?

- Pay close attention to your next period, which may start earlier or later than usual.
- Do a pregnancy test 3 weeks after using emergency contraception if:
  - your period has not started,
  - your period is different from normal,
  - you are already taking hormonal contraception.

Good to know

- The best way to protect yourself from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections is to practise safer sex:
  1. Always use a condom, male or female, for penetrative sex (vaginal or anal sex).
  2. For more personal sexual advice, do the safer sex check on www.lovelife.ch

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