

Pregnancy Prevention

For those not ready to become pregnant or cause a pregnancy, there are behaviors and medications that can be taken to help prevent unintended pregnancies.

Not engaging in any sexual behaviors that can cause a pregnancy is the most effective way of preventing one. This means avoiding any sexual behaviors where sperm could meet an egg. Preparing a back-up method in case this method fails also helps avoid unintended pregnancy.

For those who are going to participate in sexual behaviors where sperm could meet an egg, there are medications and devices called birth control or contraception that can be used to help prevent pregnancy. Some methods, like birth control pills, the patch, the ring, the shot, the implant, and some intrauterine devices (IUDs) have hormones that work by preventing the release of an egg and/or thickening cervical mucus to block the egg and sperm from meeting. There are barrier methods that physically block sperm from meeting an egg, such as internal/external condoms, the sponge, the cap, and the diaphragm.

Things like spermicide and a vaginal gel called Phexxi can be used to change the environment of the vagina so that sperm can't swim or move as well, preventing them from reaching an egg. And there are non-hormonal IUDs made of copper that interfere with sperm and make it difficult for them to reach an egg. Preparing a back-up method in case these methods fail also helps avoid unintended pregnancy. A barrier method like a condom can be used by itself and alongside these methods to further protect against pregnancy. Bonus: they also prevent against infections someone could get from sexual behaviors where they come into contact with the fluids or skin of someone with an infection.

Emergency contraception is another method of pregnancy prevention. It is used after someone has unprotected intercourse, a method fails (like a condom breaks), or after a sexual assault.

There are a few types of emergency contraception. One option is an emergency contraception pill that needs to be taken within 120 hours (5 days) after having unprotected sex. There are two main types of emergency contraceptive pills.

- The most effective emergency contraceptive pill is a progestin receptor modulator, brand name Ella. This medication is effective up to 120 hours after unprotected sex, but it's best to take it as soon as possible. Ella requires a prescription from a provider.

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- There are several brands of progestin-based emergency contraception that are available over-the-counter (i.e. Plan B, Julie). These work best if taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex but can be taken up to five days after. The sooner they are taken, the better they work.

Someone can also get certain IUDs placed within 120 hours after having unprotected sex. This is the most effective type of emergency contraception, and it can remain as a long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) method if someone chooses.

Sources

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