

What can I do if birth control is not used correctly?

KEY WORDS 

contraception | pregnancy | healthcare 

When it comes to birth control, sometimes things don't go as planned. First things first: don't panic! There is a lot you can do to take control of the situation and get help. Let's chat about **situations that lessen the effectiveness** of birth control and what you can do if your birth control wasn't used correctly.

Let's dive in to mistakes that can cause ineffective or failed birth control:

- **You're taking medications that make birth control less effective.** These medications include: supplements with St. John's Wort, medicines for HIV, anti-epilepsy or anti-fungal medicine, the antibiotic rifampin (Rimactane), medicine for migraines, and mood stabilising drugs.
- **You are improperly storing the birth control pill and condoms.** Both condoms and the birth control pill should be stored in a dry location at room temperature. So, avoid keeping them in the bathroom or somewhere with changing temperatures like a car. Keeping condoms in a wallet or in your pocket can damage it from friction.

- **You haven't taken the birth control pill, the patch and/or the injection at the expected time.** All of these methods should be taken at regular intervals. For more information on when this should be, refer to our text: "What are the different forms of birth control and how to use them?" Set an alarm if you think it will help!
- **You are not using condoms correctly.** Open a condom package carefully, so as not to rip it. When putting it on, pinch the tip lightly, so that air isn't caught inside. In addition, pay attention to the expiration date of the condom, as well as to their size, so that they fit you comfortably but not too tight. Another note: avoid using oil-based lubricants (such as baby oil and Vaseline) as they can cause latex condoms to rip. Improper usage of condoms is the #1 reasons why they break.
- **You have a high body weight.** There is some evidence to suggest that dealing with obesity lessens the effectiveness of certain birth control, such as the pill.

So, you're aware of situations that might lead to or have already led to the incorrect use of birth control. What now?

If your birth control is not used correctly...

The most common solution to the incorrect or failed use of birth control (such as a condom breaking or missing a birth control pill) is to buy a **morning-after pill**. You can usually find it at a pharmacy without needing a prescription, or schedule a visit to your doctor. You can take this emergency contraception up to 5 days after sexual contact, but they work much better if you take them **within the first 3 days**. The sooner the better! Please be aware that this pill is not designed for regular use, and it can carry short-term side effects such as nausea, vomiting, and light bleeding between periods.

If you've taken the morning after pill...

Your next step can be **getting screened for STIs**. This can be overwhelming, but completing a detailed check to see if you have any infections, by giving vaginal discharge or blood, can put your mind at ease. You needn't feel ashamed or embarrassed – the doctor's office has seen many different cases and it's a judgment-free zone.

If it's too late to use the morning after pill...

Take a pregnancy test if you miss your period or about a month after sexual contact. If your period is late and the pregnancy test is negative, wait a few more weeks and take another.

If you find yourself facing an unplanned pregnancy...

Take a deep breath – **you've still got options**. You can decide to:

- continue the pregnancy and become a parent
- explore adoption
- consider pregnancy termination (abortion)

Before making your choice, confide in your family or a trusted adult and speak with a doctor. This is stressful, but you can manage difficult situations and come out stronger at the end. Remember, you're not alone in this. Your wellbeing is what matters most, and there are people and service to support you every step of the way.

**CONTRACEPTION
AND PREGNANCY**

