

My Health Plan

Meet our Expert



My name is Dr. Ashlesha Patel and I'm an OB/GYN at Cook County Hospital in Chicago. I'm also a consultant for Planned Parenthood and Fitness magazine. I've got to say, 20-somethings today are much more open about sex than past generations. But with so many choices and so much information out there concerning your sexual health (and, really, your health overall), things can get really confusing – REALLY fast. What birth control options should I consider? Am I at risk for STDs? What do I do if the condom malfunctions? I'm going to help you answer these questions so you can learn how to make smart, healthy choices for yourself from the get-go, as well as have a backup plan for the times when your life doesn't quite go as planned.

So let's get started. Based on your assessment, here are some ideas on how you can back up your sexy side with real smarts.

Health Strategies

STEP 1: HAVE A PLAN A – CONTRACEPTION AND STD PREVENTION

GET ON IT

If you can believe it, almost half of all pregnancies in the U.S. — approximately 3.1 million — are not planned.¹ If you're sexually active, talk to your OB/GYN about what type of contraception is right for you. There are lots of choices, so do some investigating before your appointment to get familiar with the options. Read TIP 1 to get a rundown of all the birth control options available to you.

GET IT RIGHT

Once you decide on the method of birth control, be sure to use it correctly and consistently. However, in the event that your contraception method backfires (for example, the condom malfunctions), it's better to be safe than sorry. Ask your OB/GYN about emergency contraception, and whether it is the right back up plan for you. If you're on The Pill and you miss your daily dose, you should play it safe by using another form of contraception. In addition, you should read your birth control patient instructions for information on how to keep yourself best protected.

GET IT ON

Did you know about 19 million new sexually transmitted disease cases occur each year, and almost half of them are among people aged 15–24!² The lesson to be learned here: sex + no contraception = big risks. If you're not in a monogamous relationship, or you and your partner have not yet been tested for STDs, using latex condoms WITH your primary form of birth control will help prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.³

STEP 2: KNOW THERE'S A PLAN B

BE CALM

Whether you're on The Pill or are an avid condom user, sometimes things don't go exactly as planned. Maybe you forget to take The Pill on schedule. Maybe the condom malfunctions. Know there's a backup plan — Plan B® One-Step emergency contraception.

BE SMART

Plan B® One-Step is the only single-dose emergency contraception available in just one tablet. It can prevent a pregnancy up to 72 hours after unprotected sex or contraceptive failure.

- If you're 17 or older, you can get Plan B® One-Step at your pharmacy without a prescription.
- If you're younger than 17, you'll need a prescription.
- Visit www.PlanBOneStep.com for more information.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:

Plan B® One-Step (levonorgestrel) is intended to prevent pregnancy after known or suspected contraceptive failure or unprotected intercourse.

Plan B® One-Step isn't effective if you're already pregnant, and it won't terminate an existing pregnancy. Plan B® One-Step does not protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Side effects may include changes in your period, nausea, lower abdominal pain, fatigue, headache, and dizziness. If your period is more than a week late, you may be pregnant. You should not take Plan B® One-Step if you are already pregnant. Plan B® One-Step should not be used as a routine birth control, as it is not as effective. If you have severe abdominal pain, you may have an ectopic pregnancy, and should get immediate medical help. You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA at fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088. Click here for full product information.

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Resources

LINKS

Plan B® One-Step website: www.PlanBOneStep.com

Center for Reproductive Rights: www.reproductiverights.org

Emergency Contraception website (Princeton): www.ec.princeton.edu Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: www.kff.org

International Consortium for Emergency Contraception: www.ceinfo.org

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association: www.nfprha.org

Reproductive Health Technologies Project: www.rhtp.org

Pharmacy Access Partnership: www.Go2ec.org

*Disclaimer: Although the information on these websites may be useful, it should not replace the advice of your healthcare professional. For questions about birth control and other women's health issues, please speak with your doctor.

*References

¹Finer LB, Henshaw SK. "Disparities in rates of unintended pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001." Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health. 2006.

²Weinstock H, et al. "Sexually transmitted diseases among American youth: incidence and prevalence estimates, 2000." Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health. 2004.

³www.Mayoclinic.com Birth control guide. Jan. 25, 2008.