

Emergency contraception? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

My girlfriend and I had sex twice one night — the second time, we had to change condoms because she was dry and the lubricant had run out. Before I put the second condom on, she asked me to "put it in" without it on for a few seconds; which I did — not entirely all the way though. I instantly realized the mistake and withdrew. Naturally, as I expect, there is a small chance this could have gotten her pregnant. However, this was four days after her period ended, and the condoms we were using had nonoxynol-9 on the inside and outside. I had not ejaculated yet, as a matter of fact, I never did... and I had wiped the tip of my penis prior to doing this to avoid any pre-cum. My question is this: I'm hoping I'm right in assuming the chance of pregnancy is minimal — however, we are considering emergency contraception. What could you suggest?

Thanks...!

Answer

Dear Reader,

There's minimal chance of your girlfriend becoming pregnant from what seems like an understandable curiosity about what condom-less penetration feels like. From what you've written, it sounds like you were pretty careful. However, these "precautionary" measures don't guarantee 100 percent contraceptive effectiveness, as you later realized, even if you were inside her ever so briefly.

If you and your girlfriend are concerned about the possibility of conception, then emergency contraception ^[2] (EC) is an option. EC needs to be taken within 72 hours (though it may still have some effectiveness up to 120 hours) of condomless sex, sex that occurred when no birth control method was used, or if used, failed. However, *the earlier you take it, the more effective it will be at preventing pregnancy*. Several varieties of EC, including Plan B One-Step and its generic versions, are available on-the-shelf in the family planning aisles of many pharmacies and drugstores. This means that anyone, regardless of gender, can buy it without having to show proof-of-age or a prescription. Calling your local pharmacy or drugstore before you make the trip might be a good idea to see which types of EC are available.

If more than 120 hours have passed since condomless sex, EC may no longer be an option. One option is to wait and see if your girlfriend misses her period (understandably, this can be nerve-racking). If she does, she can see a health care provider for pregnancy testing or use a home pregnancy test. You and your girlfriend may also consider talking with a provider if she, or you, wants to discuss pregnancy options or backup birth control for the future.

Another thing to consider is that research has demonstrated that the spermicide nonoxynol-9 (N-9) can make people more susceptible to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. N-9 is a chemical that can irritate sensitive tissues. As such, it might create abrasions on vaginal or rectal tissue, making it easier for foreign intruders, like a virus, to penetrate. What's more, the World Health Organization says that condoms with N-9 are no more effective at preventing pregnancy than condoms alone. Using condoms with water- or silicone-based [lube](#) [3] is a great way to make sex more pleasurable and prevent condoms from breaking. You can also buy extra lube in a bottle if what comes on the condom isn't enough to keep you two going.

To prevent transmission of STIs, it's a good idea to both be tested for infections, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV. Because STIs are often asymptomatic, it's smart to be tested every time you have a new sexual partner or at times like these, when you may have had an unexpected exposure. You can talk with a health care provider about which tests are most appropriate for you.

One hundred percent safer sex can be hard to keep up, and it sounds like you're committed to being a responsible partner, which is admirable. Hopefully this little slip-up will work out okay.

Alice!

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