



inform

Morning-
After Pill

WAKE-UP CALL!

Teens aren't getting the message when it comes to safe sex. Instead of being safe between the sheets, they're turning to the morning-after pill to prevent pregnancy.

BY DEVEN KNILL



When it comes to safe sex, teens aren't getting the message. Case in point: more teens are turning to the morning-after pill today than ever. In fact, one in five teen girls are using the pill as opposed to one in 12 who used it one decade prior, according to researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The same researchers say that this increase in usage dates back to 2006 when the morning-after pill became available over-the-counter for teens 18 and older. Moreover, in 2013, the age restriction was lifted, allowing girls 17 and younger to obtain the pill without a prescription.

"[Usage of the pill] may have increased because teens seem to be engaging in sexual activity and having sex earlier than those decades before," says Sara Dimerman, psychologist, author and creator of helpmesara.com.

While the increase in the use of the morning-after pill means that teens are taking action to prevent pregnancy, it also means that they are using condoms inconsistently or not using more reliable forms of contraception such as birth control to prevent this use in the first place.

Here's what you need to know about the morning-after pill and how to talk to your teen about it.

THE PILL, EXPLAINED

The emergency contraception pill, more commonly known as the morning-after pill, contains the female hormone progestin, and can reduce the risk of pregnancy by 90 per cent if taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse. If it is taken within 24 hours, it is about 95 per cent effective.

When taken in time, the pill works to prevent the implantation of a fertilized egg, delay or prevent ►

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ovulation and interfere with the fertilization of an egg.

However, the pill does not provide protection against sexually transmitted infections or diseases. It will also not protect a woman from getting pregnant if she has sex after taking it.

THE ADVANTAGES

The advantages of the morning-after pill are that it's an effective emergency contraceptive, is easy to obtain since no prescription is required and is easy to use.

It does not have an effect on the long-term fertility of a woman and the hormones found in most types of the morning-after pill are generally safe for use.

“For many, it may be an easier option than following the nightly routine of remembering to take [birth control],” says Dimerman. “It may also be the result of an impulsive act with someone that she is not in a committed relationship with.”

THE DOWNSIDE

Potential side effects in using the morning-after pill, such as Plan B, include: headaches, nausea, fatigue, dizziness, lower abdominal pain as well as causing a woman's period to come early or late.

There is also a possibility of experiencing unexpected bleeding, but that should go away by the time of a woman's next period.

TALKING TO YOUR TEEN

While many teens might prefer to take the morning-after pill in lieu of discussing other birth control options with their parents and/or doctor, this is exactly why parents should be talking to their teens about it.

“If a parent would prefer that this not be the first option, then it is even more imperative that the parent take the time and interest required to speak about sexual activity and what the first options to prevent pregnancy would be,” says Dimerman, who adds that talking about contraception and condoning sex are two entirely different discussions.

“As difficult as it is for most parents to think or talk about their daughter or son being sexually active...turning a blind eye or burying your head in the sand is not the best option,” she says.

Her advice: Be open, be understanding, be interested to learn.

Dimerman suggests starting off by saying that you are simply aware of the idea that your teen may be engaging in sexual activity sooner than you may have. And then talk about the importance of safe sex and different methods of birth control. Lastly, if the morning-after pill isn't in your book of knowledge, study up. And bring your teen along as a learning companion.

“Suggest to your teen that you do the research about the morning-after pill together,” says Dimerman. “That way, you can learn more together.” ■