

## **INSIDE OUT EPISODE 4- EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVES**

**Juliana:** Hello, hello! Welcome to another episode of Inside Out where we talk about all things health and wellness. I'm your host, Juliana Rajamohan and I can't wait to dive into today's topic.

Alright, so I have a little story for you guys, so you walk into a store or pharmacy, and you ask for a morning after pill. The person behind you whispers to a friend and starts laughing. Suddenly, you feel like everyone is staring at you and you feel ashamed. You feel like you committed a crime trying to get the pill and think "Is this even fair?".

So, I think a lot of us probably felt this at some point or maybe we might even encounter a situation like this in the future and I think the problem with this story is not that we're wrong or that we should feel ashamed in a situation like this. I think that the problem is how we view contraception in general. On today's episode, we are going to dive into knowing everything about emergency contraception. All of the dos and don'ts.

So, a quick fact, did you know that emergency contraception can be used for unprotected intercourse, concerns with possible contraceptive failure, incorrect use of contraceptives or even sexual assault. So, before we get started with all of the questions that are probably running in our minds right now, let me introduce you to our guest today on today's episode, Elly Webster.

Hi Elly, how are you?

**Elly:** Hi, I'm doing good, thanks for having me.

**Juliana:** Of course! Thank you for joining us today. So, Elly, can you tell me a little bit about your work at Bridgercare and what you do here and how you ended up working here?

**Elly:** Yeah, absolutely! So, I'm a registered nurse, I went to nursing school. My position here is the nurse supervisor, um so I do a little bit of patient care, as well as administrative duties and management duties, um, so a little bit of both. So, I moved here, from Missoula two years ago for this job, and never really looked back. I love Bridgercare and I love what I do.

**Juliana:** That's awesome. I did intern at Bridgercare so I can kind of connect on how awesome this place is. Well, awesome, Elly. I can't wait to ask you all of the questions, give our audience everything that emergency contraception is about and I hope everyone feels informed after our little chat here.

Alright, Elly, I do have a surprise question for you. So, are you ready for that?

**Elly:** I'm ready (laughs)

**Juliana:** Okay, I always like adding like fun questions just so I can kind of see what my guests, what their personalities are like, what they do outside of work... So, your question today is: What is one thing that people are generally surprised to find out about you?

**Elly:** Ooooo... uhhh... that is a great question! What are people surprised to find out about me? Huh...ummm... I think that I, okay, I think that people get really surprised when I tell them that I am from Libby, Montana. It's a really small, conservative town in Northwest Montana and I think I get a lot of questions like "Oh you don't seem like somebody who would come out of Libby, Montana-

**Juliana:** Interesting

**Elly:** -and be working here and doing the things that you do.

**Juliana:** Oh my God! (laughs)

**Elly:** So, I think that's what surprises most people-(laughs)

**Juliana:** Interesting

**Elly:** -is where I was raised.

**Juliana:** Yeah! So, you're from Libby, moved to Missoula, lived there, and then you moved here, to Bozeman.

**Elly:** Yes, yep!

**Juliana:** Yea, a lot of here and there but-

**Elly:** Yeah! All over Montana (laughs)

**Juliana:** That's awesome, well thank you for sharing that with us, um, alright are you ready to die into the questions?

**Elly:** Yeah! Let's do it.

**Juliana:** Okay, so our first question is: What is emergency contraception and how old should you be to get it?

**Elly:** Yes, so emergency contraception is either an oral medication or even an IUD, so an intra uterine device, that can be used within a certain period, um after having unprotected sex in order to try and prevent an unintended pregnancy. There is no age restriction on who can access emergency contraception. Certain methods can be purchased over the counter while other methods require a provider visit with a healthcare provider.

**Juliana:** Gotchya, so if someone was underage for example, like under 18, can they still get the morning after pill after having sex?

**Elly:** Yep and they can also get an IUD as well.

**Juliana:** Oh! Okay, so you don't need parental consent or anything like that?

**Elly:** Nope

**Juliana:** Well, that's good to know for our younger audience! Can you talk a little bit about the types of emergency contraception?

**Elly:** Yeah, so, emergency contraception primarily takes those two forms that I mentioned, so either hormonal pills called Plan B and Ella is the other one, and then also intrauterine devices. So with the Plan B and the Ella, these are oral medications that can be taken within 3-5 days after unprotected sex. And then the most effective form of emergency contraception is the IUD. So the IUD may or may not contain hormones depending on which one you choose for emergency contraception and these methods can be used for up to 12 years to prevent pregnancy should the patient desire, so that's like a two for one.

**Juliana:** And I think IUD has a... 99% effectiveness?

**Elly:** Yes, yep. You got it.

**Juliana:**- and then you can either get the copper one or the hormonal one and that's up to like, what you desire, and once you have that conversation with the provider.

**Elly:** So, both the Mirena IUD and the Paragard IUD can be used as emergency contraception up to five days after unprotected intercourse.

**Juliana:** Wow! We are learning some new stuff here. Alright, how does emergency contraception work? Like how does it, like, does it take an immediate effect or do you have to wait a little bit?

**Elly:** So, there's no waiting period. So emergency contraception pills work by releasing a large amount of hormone called progesterone, the intent is to stop ovulation in order to prevent an unfertilized egg from encountering a sperm. So, it's taken retroactively to prevent the sperm from fertilizing an egg. You can't take it to prevent unprotected intercourse tonight, today. Does that make sense?

**Juliana:** Yeah, yeah. So it's after...

**Elly:** Yes. After the fact. Yeah, and same with the IUDs, it can either, um, prevent that ovulation from happening.

**Juliana:** I've also read that sometimes people are concerned that taking a contraception pill like Plan B is considered like an abortion pill because you're technically preventing a pregnancy. What do you have to say for that?

**Elly:** I would say that that statement is absolutely incorrect. Emergency contraception will do nothing to impact an existing pregnancy. If someone has already ovulated or fertilization of that egg has already occurred- the sperm has already met that egg- or, if you're already pregnant, emergency contraception will do nothing to change that or to harm an existing pregnancy.

**Juliana:** Gotcha, and so the window for that to work is within five days, so if someone were to take it toward the end of that window, does it work the same as if you were to take it before like at the beginning of the window?

**Elly:** So the sooner the better. Ideally, as soon as you have unprotected intercourse you would wanna give us a call and get in that day would be the ideal situation and an ideal candidate. There is a little bit different, so that five days um is for Ella and for the IUD. Plan B is really after three days after that unprotected intercourse it becomes way less effective. So that's really 72 hours.

**Juliana:** Okay, alright, Yeah, that's a good timeline to know. In what situations and how frequently should emergency contraception be used?

**Elly:** Great question. So, the ideal candidate for emergency contraception would have only had one instance on unprotected sex in the last 3-5 days. So, not multiple, that would be ideal

**Juliana:** Yea

**Elly:** Those who have had multiple instances of unprotected intercourse extended beyond that window are still able to take emergency contraception pills, however, if they have already become pregnant or already ovulated in their cycle, the pill will be ineffective. IUDs are not able to be used as emergency

contraception if there has been unprotected intercourse within the previous two weeks prior to those five days.

**Juliana:** Okay

**Elly:** Because we need to make certain that you're not pregnant prior to inserting and IUD.

**Juliana:** Gotchya

**Elly:** So, emergency contraception is not a form of birth control and should only be used in emergency situations, just like in the name. The effectiveness of emergency contraception pills is entirely dependent on whether an egg has already been released and whether ovulation has already occurred in your cycle.

**Juliana:** That's great information!

**Elly:** That's a lot of information (laughs)

**Juliana:** We should condense all of that and put it in a flyer and stick it all over!

Alright, if emergency contraception is used how do you shift to other contraception methods?

**Elly:** Yeah, so this is important. Many birth control methods can be started on the same day that emergency contraception is used, but certain emergency contraception pills may interfere with hormonal contraception, so like, birth control pills, so there may be some lag time before your provider recommends starting a hormonal method. But if an IUD is placed, that's basically like I said, a two for one. After taking an emergency contraception pill it is always advisable to follow up with a urine pregnancy test in about two weeks after taking it to be certain.

**Juliana:** Okay, yes, and do you usually perform a pregnancy test before an IUD is placed in general?

**Elly:** Yes, with all IUD insertions we will do a urine pregnancy test here at Bridgercare. And if you tell us that you have had unprotected intercourse in the last two weeks we might defer until you have used a back up method like condoms or another form of birth control consistently for two weeks so we can make certain that you're not pregnant.

**Juliana:** Yeah, so if someone is already on birth control pills and decided to have unprotected sex and then they used plan b the next day, can we go back to their regular dose of taking that birth control on the same day?

**Elly:** Yes, so Plan B you can. But if someone has missed a birth control pill, it is advisable that they contact their provider first because emergency contraception may not even be necessary. So, Ella is a emergency contraception pill that can impact hormonal contraceptives. So not plan b, it's that Ella. So to get that Ella pill you do have to have a provider visit unlike with plan b that is available over the counter. The reason that Ella isn't available over the counter is because we need to provide education that hormonal birth control may not be effective. So your healthcare provider will review next steps if you come in for the Ella and you've missed a couple of pills, but basically we recommend using barrier methods like condoms immediately following taking the Ella pill since the efficacy of hormonal contraceptives can be decreased after taking Ella for a certain period of time.

**Juliana:** I see. So does Ella have the same active ingredient as plan b or is it a little bit different?

**Elly:** No, it's different. It's a different- so Plan B is a high dose of Levonorgestrel and Ella... I'm gonna botch the name, but it is a different medication all together but they both work in the same way to prevent ovulation.

**Juliana:** I see

**Elly:** Ella is a bit more effective like I had mentioned it can be used for up to five days, but there is just that provider visit required to discuss if you're on hormonal birth control you might be having to use barrier methods because it can decrease the efficacy of it or you could just wait and start them it just depends on your situation.

**Juliana:** Great, so the people have two options!

**Elly:** Yeah! Two pills.

**Juliana:** So, how safe is it to use emergency contraception?

**Elly:** Incredibly safe (laughs)

**Juliana:** Yeah

**Elly:** That's all I have to say, it's very safe... yeah. There's not really many contraindications other than like if you've had multiple instances. For inserting and IUD if you've had sex in the last two weeks prior to that five days. Very very minimal side effects, if any. Like I said, with Ella, potential can effect hormonal birth control, otherwise, some nausea.

**Juliana:** Okay, yeah. I think people can like... that's like an easy fix. Are there any interferences with birth control pills. I know you mentioned no contra indications with other medications. I might have already asked you this, but can you still use the morning after pill if you forget your birth control pill?

**Elly:** Yeah, I think we just went over this. I think I answered this question basically. So, with plan b, yes, you can, but will Ella, that's the one where you would want to come talk with a provider and potentially use condoms for a while because it can decrease the effectiveness of a hormonal contraception.

**Juliana:** And to establish care here at Bridgercare can you just call or can you do a walk in?

**Elly:** Yes, so if you are needing emergency contraception of any type, Bridgercare really strives to get you in same day. So, give us a call, if you walk in, that's fine too we will definitely try to fit you in same day even if you want an IUD.

**Juliana:** Oh wow.

**Elly:** Yeah, the providers here are really great if you need emergency contraception, and you want an IUD we try and do what we can.

**Juliana:** That's awesome! I'm so glad that you mentioned that because I think one of the problems with the healthcare here and how it is set up is accessibility. I know most people don't want to wait 2 or 3 months to get an IUD or have someone to see so they can get the care they need so I am glad that Bridgercare is trying to make that effort to have that accessibility across the board.

Alright, so does emergency contraception work for everyone or should there be concerns or is there anything else that we need to know about emergency contraception?

**Elly:** So, emergency contraception does not work for everyone. So, there are several situations in which emergency contraception will not be effective. So, if a person is outside of that time frame and has had other instances of unprotected sex if they have already ovulated or become pregnant, it is not going to work, unfortunately. Additionally, a person's body weight does need to be taken into consideration when choosing which emergency contraception pill to use, so unfortunately, Plan B the efficacy really appears to decrease with increasing Body Mass Index with like 25 to 26. Now a BMI of 25 to 26 is not very high. That is not a very high BMI, so we will ask you questions. Sometimes height and weight to determine what emergency contraception will work best for you assuming you do call to speak with a healthcare provider about it. Plan B is just the least effective method versus Ella and IUDs. So, we really try to get folks in if they are willing to come in for a visit and take Ella if they want to do a pill because it is just more effective. But the great thing about Plan B is you don't need a provider visit. It's just something really important to keep in mind that a BMI of 25 or above it's gonna really decrease in effectiveness.

**Juliana:** Is that the case with IUD as well? Like, do you determine the weight and height before you get an IUD?

**Elly:** No, that's a great question. Nope, it doesn't matter for an IUD.

**Juliana:** Alright, that's an alternative. Lots of great alternatives in this podcast. I love it.

Alright, so, how long does emergency contraception protect a woman from pregnancy?

**Elly:** Emergency contraception pills do not protect against pregnancy for any period of time after they are taken. So I think we touched on this at the beginning, but they are only taken retro actively for protection for unprotected sex within the last 3 to 5 days, so there is a rapid return to fertility that is expected after taking emergency contraception. However, if an IUD is used for emergency contraception, the protection can last up to 12 years- Paragard is good for 12 years- and it is over 99% effective. (laughs) Love those IUDs.

**Juliana:** Yes. I do have a very sensitive question for people who might have experienced sexual assault or rape, is there like a confidentiality policy that's in place in Bridgercare for people who have experienced those to get the care that they need?

**Elly:** Yeah, so everyone at Bridgercare goes through HIPPA training and confidentiality training. Your care here is completely confidential. Every patient seeking care here has that right under HIPPA laws. You can request certain providers if you have an established care with a provider and you feel comfortable with a certain provider that is absolutely acceptable as well.

**Juliana:** That's great.

**Elly:** Everything is completely confidential.

**Juliana:** Yeah, so that's the gold standard. To keep things confidential when they need to be! Awesome, well... I have one last question. Where can we get emergency contraception, does Bridgercare have emergency contraceptive pills here?

**Elly:** Yeah, so Bridgercare does have emergency contraception, and it is often cheaper here than most other places. You can give our front desk a call if you need or want to discuss emergency contraception. We can discuss options and financial factors. Over the counter Plan B at Bridgercare costs \$10.

**Juliana:** Only ten dollars?! (laughs)

**Elly:** Yeah! You can walk right in here and get \$10 Plan B over the counter. We also offer a sliding fee scale for emergency contraception visits to all of our patients—that's income driven—so this means that emergency contraception could even be free of charge if you have a visit. You can also get emergency contraception at most pharmacies over the counter in town, cost fluctuates and if you opt for an intrauterine device (IUD) at Bridgercare, we strive to get those patients in like I said, same day for those devices.

**Juliana:** Yeah, that's awesome. So if someone scheduled like an annual visit and they wanted to pick up like a Plan B or Ella can they still pick it up after their visit?

**Elly:** Yeah! We can hand it to them at their visit in the office.

**Juliana:** Oh, perfect! That's awesome! And, what does the shelf life look like for Plan B?

**Elly:** So all emergency contraception pills will come labeled with an expiration date on the box. The medication shouldn't be used after that time frame, but every box of emergency contraception pill will have an expiration date on there.

**Juliana:** Well, that's awesome and I am so happy that Bridge care offers a cheaper alternative to the same pill that you can get across town so if you're local, if you live in Bozeman, if you're driving through Bozeman, feel free to check out Bridgercare you can get in on the same day- they really try to do that- and you can still pick up an emergency contraceptive pill that's probably half the price compared to other pharmacies around town so don't miss this.

Well, that concludes our episode and I hope you all found it very insightful and I want to thank you, Elly, this was so great and it was lovely chatting with you and your extensive amount of knowledge on this. I am sure your patients definitely love you!

**Elly:** Awww, thank you so much! I'm so glad we are talking about this and getting it out there in the community!

**Juliana:** Mhm, that is exactly my goal for this podcast. I just want people to be more informed and that way they can make more informed decisions. I do have one request for all of you listening today. Please don't feel ashamed for seeking the care that you need and don't put others in a situation where they feel ashamed. Being open and receptive to the right information can ease our minds during difficult situations. So please please please don't feel ashamed if you're looking for care anywhere. Even if it is in the U.S., even if it is somewhere else. Make sure you have the right information and I hope this podcast gives you that courage to ask the right questions even in difficult situations. I also want to give you guys the opportunity to be compassionate to yourselves and to others who might be in the same situation. If you like this podcast, please subscribe to keep us up with all of the hot topics and we have a lot more awesome topics coming up. So feel free to email us with any questions you might have or any topics you would like us to cover. We would love to take your recommendations and put them into a podcast and

share it with you guys. Thank you again for tuning in to today's episode. I can't wait to come back with another one to share next time.