Patient Information for Ella (ulipristal acetate) for Emergency Contraception

What is Ella?
Ella is a single dose oral pill that is used to decrease the chance of an unintended pregnancy following unprotected vaginal intercourse. Unprotected vaginal intercourse refers to vaginal intercourse that occurs without use of contraception. This includes: no condom, condom breakage, missed doses of birth control pills or late insertion of Nuvaring.

How does Ella work?
Ella is an “anti-progesterone” and works primarily by delaying or preventing ovulation (release of an egg from the ovary). If there is no egg for sperm in the semen to fertilize, then the risk of pregnancy is greatly reduced. It may also work by preventing attachment of a fertilized egg to the uterine lining. If you are already pregnant, Ella will not interrupt or end a pregnancy.

When should Ella be taken?
Ella is most effective for preventing pregnancy when taken as soon as possible after unprotected vaginal intercourse. Ella is effective if taken up to 5 days following vaginal intercourse, but the efficacy decreases after 72 hours. Ella is approximately 98% effective if taken within the first 24 hours, and 85-95% effective when taken within 72 hours.

What do I need to know about Ella?
Ella is less effective in women who are overweight, with a body mass index of greater than 30.
You can only take Ella once per cycle.

You should not take Ella if you are already pregnant, so you may want to take a pregnancy test before taking Ella (but this is not required).

Some medications may decrease the efficacy of Ella - including St John's Wort, phenytoin, rifampin, phenobarbital, and carbamazepine. Antacids and proton pump inhibitors such as Prilosec can decrease absorption of Ella and therefore decrease the efficacy of Ella. Talk to your medical provider if you are taking these medications.

Possible side effects from Ella may include headache, nausea, uterine cramping, abdominal pain and irregular menstrual bleeding. You may experience spotting or have a menstrual period a few days early or a few days later than expected. If you do not have a menstrual period within 3 weeks of taking Ella, you should have a pregnancy test. If you develop severe lower abdominal pain 3-5 weeks after taking Ella, you could have an ectopic pregnancy. This is very rare, but it is a medical emergency, and you should seek emergency medical attention.

Once Ella is taken, it can decrease the effectiveness of oral contraceptive for the rest of the pack, and therefore if you take oral contraceptives to prevent pregnancy, you will need to use a backup contraceptive method (such as condoms) until your next menstrual bleeding.

Ella requires a prescription, and is usually covered by insurance. The cost without insurance is about $38. You might consider asking your health care provider for a prescription for Ella to have on hand.

Reference: J. Trussell, E. Raymond, 2013 Jan 2018 Elson Student Health Gynecology