Plan B Has Limited Effect on Bleeding Patterns

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BOSTON — A single dose of Plan B (levonorgestrel) alters the timing and duration of the menstrual period that immediately follows emergency contraception, according to a new study. Taken early in the cycle, it causes the menstrual period to commence earlier than usual. Taken late in the cycle, it prolongs the next menstrual period.

But intermenstrual bleeding is uncommon, and menstrual timing resumes its normal pattern with the second cycle said coauthor James Trussell, Ph.D., professor and director of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. Dr. Trussell presented the research at a conference on contraceptive technology sponsored by Contemporary Forums. The paper was simultaneously published in the journal Contraception (2006;73:376-81). The study may help to settle an ongoing debate about the clinical significance of bleeding after the use of emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs). Several previous studies have suggested that ECPs provoke intermenstrual bleeding. The new study’s message—that Plan B merely hastens the end of a cycle and that this effect is short-lived—will be reassuring to many women.

For women with late menses, however, the study suggests a pregnancy test may be in order.

Plan B emergency contraception...