

FERTILITY

## THE BABY-MAKING DIET

Eat well, cut stress... and try a 'fish and chip' bath. Natural fertility expert Emma Cannon shares her secrets of preparing for pregnancy

Words BRIGID MOSS



Cannon's approach to fertility is all about nourishing yourself

**S**o you're ready to get pregnant. You bin the Pill or condoms, have sex and that's it, right? Possibly not. Aged 30, you have a one in five chance of conceiving each month. Aged 40, it's down to one in 20. One in seven couples have difficulty conceiving.

That's where Emma Cannon comes in. She helps women create a fertile environment in their body, to prepare for conception. Qualified in Traditional Chinese medicine, she's specialised in fertility acupuncture for more than 20 years, >>



and patients often come to her via IVF clinics as well as word of mouth.

Cannon seems an unlikely health guru, dressed in black wool Marni trackpants and slippers (her Chelsea clinic is a shoe-free zone). The walls are painted French grey, and it's homely, furnished with an eclectic mix of Moroccan rugs, pretty lace curtains, Indian pink upholstery and flower paintings by one of her former patients. Long before the current wellness trend, when I first went to see her 11 years ago, Cannon was treating patients with acupuncture, serving green tea in delicate saucer-like cups – lukewarm, which keeps it from being bitter – and advising me to boil up bones for nutrient-rich broth. Her approach to fertility

seemed the opposite of medicine and IVF; all about looking after and nourishing yourself.

**AS WELL AS PRACTISING ACUPUNCTURE, CANNON TRAINED WITH DOCTORS AT THE VIVA MAYR CLINIC IN AUSTRIA.**

That clinic's focus on digestion as the root of good health chimes with her training, she says. "I can tell everything I need to know from your menstrual cycle and your digestion, as well as how you present yourself emotionally, and the overall climate of your life," she tells me.

It was an annus horribilis 12 years ago that inspired her treatment philosophy today. That year, she had a miscarriage at 20 weeks, crashed

two cars and was diagnosed with breast cancer that had spread to her lymph glands. "I used to treat women all day, then race across London to pick up my two daughters from school, felt I had to cook them perfect, organic meals. You can live a very healthy life but in a really dysfunctional way."

The fact Cannon had surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy for her cancer reflects her working practice – working alongside medicine as opposed to instead of it. What came out of her recovery was the importance of flexibility rather than control. "What's good about control? All the best stuff, like love, happens when you let go of it," she smiles.



Beetroot is rich in nitric oxide, good for blood flow, including the uterus and ovaries

## BEETROOT SOUP

*SERVES 2*

*PREPARATION TIME:*

*20 minutes*

*COOKING TIME: 35 minutes*

- 1 tbsp coconut oil
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 4 raw beetroot, peeled and cut into 1cm cubes
- 1 waxy potato, peeled and cut into 1cm cubes
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 500ml chicken bone broth or vegetable stock

**1** Heat the coconut oil in a large, heavy pan and gently sauté the onion over a low heat for five minutes. Add the beetroot, potato, fennel seeds and garlic and stir, then pour over the broth and bring to the boil.

**2** Reduce the heat and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Leave to cool for a few minutes, then blend until smooth. Return to the pan and reheat gently. Season to taste.

**3** Serve warm with yoghurt, sour cream or crème fraîche and grated horseradish, or served chilled with an ice cube or two, sliced spring onions, radishes and coriander.

Often the women she sees are the opposite. “I see women who are underweight, have no periods at all. On the surface, they may have a healthy lifestyle, but underneath there is an ultra vigilance.” One client had seen so many nutritionists, she was left with very few ‘allowed’ foods. “Sometimes I just say, forget the diet, it’s so joyless,” says Cannon. “In my clinic, I used to leave my first book *The Baby-Making Bible* next to the *Flat Belly Diet*. I can’t tell you how many women picked up the diet book.”

Her new book, *Fertile*, is full of recipes for delicious, nutritious food, requested by clients. “I wrote it because a lot of things people cut out for ‘wellness’ are good for fertility,” says Cannon. Full-fat dairy, for one, good fats in general, like seeds, even meat.

Cannon makes a distinction between infertility – women with no eggs, blocked tubes, men with no sperm – and subfertility, which is everyone else, and for which lifestyle changes may be helpful. If you’re younger, she says, you’re likely resilient to the negative impact of alcohol, lack of sleep, not great food, can get away with it and get pregnant. Though fertility isn’t totally age dependent, she adds. “Some women are as fertile at 40 as others are at 20.”

**IN HER TED TALK, CANNON TALKS ABOUT A MENTAL STATE OF ABUNDANCE AS A FERTILE STATE OF MIND.** I ask her how attitude can make a difference to fertility. “On some level, we conceive when we feel safe,” she says. “If you’re pumping out loads of adrenaline, the body thinks it’s in danger. There is research that shows the likelihood of conception is reduced when stress levels are high.”



Chestnuts contain polyphenols, which can help feed your beneficial gut bacteria



Women are often panicking by the time they see Cannon, trying to get pregnant by living perfectly. “The conversation about fertility is always about fear and lack – ‘she left it too late’, for example. The fertile window becomes a monthly obsession and the monthly bleed a heart-wrenching disappointment.”

Cannon wants to change this, for women to thrive during trying to get pregnant and to get pregnant, by finding balance, learning to relax, being flexible, thinking in terms of abundance, not lack.

“If you want to nourish another person, first you must nourish yourself. Understand what your body needs and what makes you happy. And be kind to yourself.” *Fertile: Nourish And Balance Your Body For Baby Making* by Emma Cannon (Ebury, £20)

“If you want to NOURISH another person, first you must nourish YOURSELF”

## CHESTNUT AND HERB PESTO

This is very adaptable: serve with pasta, dollop in soup, or loosen with a little oil and serve with roasted vegetables or chicken.

**MAKES 375g**  
**PREPARATION TIME:**  
5 minutes

- 100g vacuum-packed chestnuts
- 1 small garlic clove, crushed
- 12 large sage leaves
- 25g flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 Blend all the ingredients until the mixture is coarsely chopped. The pesto will keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a week, or it can be frozen in ice-cube trays. >>





Nuts and seeds are packed with important nutrients for fertility, such as iron and calcium



## Emma Cannon's fertile cleanse

**This is not a detox – it's a way to introduce a healthier, more delicious style of eating, and better digestion.** A gentle word of advice is not to *plan* to make a baby; instead I want you to think about it in terms

of preparation. Things may happen easily, or they may take a little longer, and the more wedded to your plan you are, the harder it will be to be flexible and resourceful if things don't go to schedule.

I suggest you don't immediately overhaul your entire life by stripping away all the fun things you do as a couple and removing all the foods you love to eat. Set aside a month where you gently shift your focus to preparing for a baby.

- Sort out your cupboards. Get rid of anything processed or packaged. Stock up on: wholegrains, including spelt and rye, gluten-free grains (quinoa, buckwheat, oats), legumes and lentils, seeds (black and white sesame, pumpkin, chia, flax, sunflower), nuts (almonds, brazils, walnuts), tinned fish (sardines and anchovies), herbal teas, nut butters, dried seaweed, dried fruits, raw cacao, oils (olive, coconut, hempseed, pumpkin, avocado).
- Aim to eat five to eight servings of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Boil up bones to make a bone broth (see Redonline.co.uk).
- Begin each day with hot water and lemon. Breakfast: eggs, avocado or goat's or sheep's cheese on toasted rye, or porridge with seeds and butter (and a small amount of honey).
- Lunch is your main meal, and dinner should be eaten by 7pm to help your digestion. No raw food with dinner; it's hard to digest. Soup is the ideal dinner.
- Drink two litres of room-temperature water and herbal teas a day, but don't drink with food.
- Eat calmly, chewing well – and not while looking at a screen.
- Look after yourself. Try dry-skin brushing, starting on the soles of the feet, brushing towards the heart. Or hot and cold showers: switch back and forth for two minutes at a time. Or try a 'fish and chip' bath: add a handful of magnesium-rich Epsom salts and a cupful of cider vinegar.
- Exercise moderately and regularly, doing something you like, such as walking, dancing, yoga or a bike ride. ■

### SPICED DATE AND ALMOND CANNON-BALLS

**MAKES 10 to 14 balls**  
**PREPARATION TIME:**  
*20 minutes*

- 140g pitted dates
- 100g ground almonds
- 2 tsp coconut oil
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground green cardamom

- 20g sesame seeds (black and/or white)

**1** Put all the ingredients, except the sesame seeds, into a food processor and blend into a thick paste.

To make blending easier, you can soak the dates in a little water, then blend everything together with some of the water.

**2** Roll portions of the mixture into bite-sized balls. Roll in the sesame seeds to coat. Store in an airtight container for up to a week.