

[IMAGE]

The Healing Power of Soup

By Zhenya K. Wine

As the weather gets colder, nothing warms the soul like homemade soup. From a health perspective, many of the classic favorites now include organic vegetables and whole grains. Find out why these comfort foods should be a staple in your winter diet.

"Have some chicken soup" is what we hear from our friends and family when they find out we are sick with a cold or flu. After putting up a small fight, we agree that soup sounds good at a time when nothing else seems to taste good. It is our body's natural disposition to heal itself, and chicken soup, according to numerous studies, is a substance that will help our ailing bodies to create an environment that aids in the process.

According to an article published by the Nebraska Medical Center, there is evidence that "chicken soup might have an anti-inflammatory activity, namely, the inhibition of neutrophil migration." Neutrophils are white blood cells that are found in abundance when we are sick, especially when there is a bacterial infection. These cells travel to the infection site and attack the offending organisms in order to neutralize them. The study shows that the presence of chicken soup in the tube excites these white blood cells and makes them more aggressive. Although it is unclear what components of the chicken soup are responsible for the action, researchers concluded, "Chicken soup may contain a number of substances with beneficial medicinal activity. A mild anti-inflammatory effect could be one mechanism by which the soup could result in the mitigation of symptomatic upper respiratory tract infections."

In other countries, soup is eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is a filling, inexpensive type of comfort food that exists in all cultures. Soups are complex in their preparation due to the multiple steps that have to be taken in a correct order and with proper product combination in each step. In this article, I would like to teach you some of the basic concepts in soup preparation so that the soups you create always come out right.

Woman stirring soup that she is cooking. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark We will begin with the stock, which is the most important part of the soup. Why, you may ask? The reason is simple. By boiling fish, beef, chicken or any other animal flesh, we are extracting the products that are contained in that flesh.

For that reason, Oriental and European cooks will do the following:

One: Select products that have various components leached out of them: bones, skin, cartilage, meat. I examine the products I use in soups with great care because of this extraction. To this day, I buy only organic or wild meat and fish, and I find out how the animals were raised, fed and slaughtered. Kosher butchering assures you that no blemishes are present in your stock and that the most humane methods of butchering were used. When the chicken is boiled whole rather than just using the breast meat (in Europe and Asia, they include the feet, neck and gizzards in their stock), you will see a greater amount of collagen in the soup and, generally speaking, the soup will have a stronger smell and flavor.

Two: Throw away the first-boiled fluid. The first water boils the imperfections and processing fluids out of the meat or fish. Place the meat or fish into a small amount of water and bring it to a boil. For meat, boil it for 10 minutes (for fish, 5 minutes). Then pour the water out, wash the meat or fish, place it back into the pot of cold water and simmer for 5-8 hours. Next, add spices (sea salt, onion, bay leaf, peppercorns, etc.) to flavor the broth. Simply strain the broth and use it for the soup, or reserve it for further preparation. The meat or fish you strained out can be used in other recipes or in the soup you are preparing, although it is generally believed that the meat itself does not have any healing properties and is used only to flavor the soup.

Three: Add vegetables, according to their firmness, to a hot stock - potatoes, carrots, celery and other roots first. Cabbage and other leafy vegetables are added toward the end. Although there is no evidence that the vegetables contribute to the beneficial effects of chicken soup, the vegetables give the soup substance, as well as making it taste better. Many of these vegetables also have vitamins and minerals that can aid in the healing process.

Four: Add grains at the same time you add the leafy vegetables. It takes about 20 minutes for both to be cooked. The grains give the soup a very specific flavor and thickness, but the nutritional and healing properties of these grains should not be overlooked. Millet is high in protein and has a great balance of amino acids, including high lysine and methionine + cystine levels, as well as linolenic acid. Lysine allows the body to heal and helps the immune response by creating antibodies. Buckwheat is a grain that is high in rutin, which has antioxidant qualities, and has been linked to helping patients fight cancer and inflammation. It also aids in cardiovascular health by building stronger capillaries, lowering blood pressure, reducing swelling in the legs due to venous insufficiency, and lowering LDL cholesterol, thus aiding in heart health.

Barley is another incredible grain that has been shown to lower sugars in diabetic patients, according to several recent studies conducted by Lund University.

Five: Add spices last - do not overboil. When you add spices, you add both flavor and antioxidant healing properties, but overexposing them to heat can destroy the elements that make each spice healthy. For several decades, scientists have been astonished by a low occurrence of cancer in the Thai population. After a number of research studies were conducted, the spices in tom yum (hot and sour) soup - a staple in the Thai diet - were believed to have cancer-fighting effects. In 2005, researchers at Israel's Ben Gurion University of the Negev conducted an *in vitro* study of the effects of citral, a compound found in lemongrass, which is one of the components of tom yum soup. The study showed that as little as 1 gram of citral causes cancer cells to "commit suicide: using apoptosis, a mechanism called programmed cell death" while the healthy cells remained untouched.

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Tom Yum Hot & Sour soup. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Soup Recipes**

Tom Yum (Hot & Sour) Soup

Pour stock into a deep cooking pot. De-shell and de-vein the shrimp, and add the heads and shells to the stock. Add lemon grass, garlic, galangal, ginger, chilies and lime leaves. Bring to a boil and cook for 15-30 minutes. Strain the liquid and dispose of the rest. Add the mushrooms and shrimp. Boil for 10 minutes on medium heat. Add the coconut milk and fish sauce (in 1-tablespoon increments since it is quite salty). If the soup is too spicy for your taste, add more coconut milk. You may substitute shrimp with chicken, meat or tofu. Add fresh cilantro to the soup when you serve it, but do not boil it in the soup.

- 4 cups homemade chicken stock (see chicken vegetable soup recipe)
- 2 stalks lemongrass (thinly slice, use the succulent part only)
- 4 kaffir lime leaves
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 inch of galangal root (sliced thinly)
- 1 inch of ginger, chopped

- 1-3 red or green Thai chilies, quartered and seeded
- 1/2 cup fresh chopped cilantro
- 1 can of straw mushrooms
- 3-4 tbsp of fish sauce
- 1 lb fresh shrimp (heads and shell on, found at the Asian market)
- 1 can coconut milk

Chicken Vegetable Soup

Boil the chicken in a small amount of water for 10 minutes, pour the water out, wash the bird, and place it in a large stock pot with 2 gallons of purified water, 1 whole large onion (peeled), 10 peppercorns and sea salt. Bring to a boil and simmer for at least 5 hours. Strain the stock out and reserve the meat to work with later. Return the stock to the pot, and add the potatoes and celery. Bring to a boil; reduce the heat to medium and boil for 10-15 minutes. Add the shredded cabbage, carrots, chopped onions, tomatoes, buckwheat and barley. Add the bay leaves and lovage, and taste to see if you need to add salt. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Check to see if your grains and the cabbage are done. If done, remove from heat and let rest for at least 1 hour to see how the flavors combined. Note: The chicken you strained out earlier can be used in other recipes or added to the soup. If you are having trouble finding lovage, consider replacing it with a couple stems of lemon grass (use the succulent part of the lower stem).

- Chicken Vegetable soup. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark One 4-6 lb free-range chicken
- 2 gallons of purified water
- 6 large Yukon Gold potatoes cut into 8-12 pieces
- 4 medium-to-large carrots, shredded
- 1 medium head of cabbage, shredded
- 3 stems of celery chopped
- 2 large onions (one whole and one chopped)
- 3 bay leaves
- 1/2 cup of roasted buckwheat
- 1/2 cup of small pearl barley
- 2 tablespoons of sea salt (to taste)
- 4 large tomatoes peeled and chopped, or 2 cans of stewed tomatoes

- 10 peppercorns
- a small bunch of fresh lovage (if you can find it) or 2 tablespoons of dry lovage

The hot, complex meal that is presented in a soup has been proven over thousands of years and in thousands of cultures to be one of the most beneficial to our health. Soups are easy to digest, get better with time, and in many cultures are found to be an irreplaceable staple of daily life. I hope that in this cold and flu season you stay well and, please, have a bowl of soup.

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