

Soup-stenance



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Soup is the quintessential comfort food, maybe partly because it helps “worries go down better,” according to a Yiddish proverb. But best of all, soups are deeply nourishing. They are also a simple way to add numerous nutritive vegetables to the menu. Any season of the year is the perfect time to ladle out a mug of sweet butternut bisque, a hardy hamburger medley, or an elegant, yet simple, egg drop soup. And anyone can make a satisfying, slurpable soup-based meal using the following basic formula and a little know-how.

SOUP AND ALL THAT IMPLIES

Soups can be separated into two main groups: clear and thick. “Stew” is often used interchangeably with “soup,” with the main difference being soups contain more liquid and stews are chunkier. Thick soups are often further defined by the chosen thickening agent: purées are thickened with starch, bisques often use puréed vegetables and shellfish, and cream soups are often thickened with a roux (blend of a liquid, flour and butter), cream, rice, tubers, or grains.

HOMEMADE BONE BROTH BASE

Bone broths made from chicken, fish or beef bones are a staple of the traditional food way of life. The storehouse of nutrients liberated from bone and connective tissues accelerates overall healing and supports our own bones, as well as teeth, joints, digestion and immunity. Properly prepared broth contains a generous amount of a wide range of minerals, such as calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and silica. Think of it as the ultimate multi-mineral “supplement.” Since these naturally derived minerals are extracted from bone, they are in an ideal balance and easily utilized by the body.¹

Ramiel Nagel, author of the excellent book *Cure Tooth Decay*, asserts homemade broth is one of the most potent medicines for reversing and preventing tooth decay and recommends one to two cups each day in his Balanced Tooth Decay and Remineralization Program.² And Nagel reminds us that Dr. Price himself prescribed daily beef or fish stews as part of his tooth decay control protocol.

Gelatin is another superstar found in this traditional tonic. Although not a complete protein itself, gelatin allows the body to more fully utilize proteins from other foods,^{3,4} which helps explain why gelatin-dense stocks are such a vital part of European kitchen traditions, like gravies, stews, and soups. Gelatin also has a solid reputation for calming an irritated digestive tract and aiding digestion,⁵ as well as relieving peptic ulcers, infections, and even helping overcome cancer.⁶ The amino acid glycine, found in gelatin, specifically improves digestion by enhancing gastric acid secretion.^{7,8} In fact, research published in 1982 in the *American Journal of Physiology* found that this substance promoted digestion by boosting the secretion of gastric juice, bringing the amount of hydrochloric acid in the stomach to normal levels.⁹ This is excellent news for those suffering from intestinal conditions, including indigestion. It is now understood that most often indigestion is actually a result of too little acid.¹⁰ Furthermore, the ability to secrete gastric acid naturally decreases with age, which is another reason why broth on the daily menu is a special boon to mature diners. Stomach acid is necessary for many functions, particularly digesting protein.¹¹ Adequate acidity of the stomach is also critical for the absorption of many nutrients, such as calcium, folic acid, B vitamins and magnesium.

Also rendered from cartilage and tendons are chondroitin sulphate and glucosamine, nutrients with a stellar reputation for soothing arthritis and joint pain. Consuming “bone soup” every day will help tremendously in the repair and improvement of bone and tendon strength, skin, vessels, ligaments and cartilage.¹²

Finally, broth’s cold-healing ability is no wives’ tale. Dr. Stephen Rennard, a pulmonary specialist at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, found that chicken soup elicits an anti-inflammatory effect on the body—mainly due to the mineral-rich stock of its base. The viral bugs that cause a cold or flu stimulate formation of inflammatory compounds in the body, which are to blame for many, if not most, symptoms.¹³ As in many chicken soup recipes, Rennard’s version calls for nutrient-rich ingredients like onions, carrots, celery, parsley, sweet potatoes, turnips, and more, which also release nutrients into the broth-base to make a power-packed punch of nutrition and cold-fighting potential.

Traditional foodies Amanda Rose and her mother Jeanie Rose, creators of the wonderful website www.traditional-foods.com, developed an easy, fuss-free continuous bone broth method using a crockpot. While the continuous part is unique, her success in producing twelve days of wiggly gelatin-rich broth from the same batch of bones is downright Nobel Prize worthy! Amanda documents her whole process on a YouTube video available on her website. She found using beef feet (the cut of bone right above the hoof) makes batch after batch of gelatinous stock. Amanda simply strains the current stock from the crockpot, adds fresh water (and vegetables if desired) until she is tired of it or the bones have disintegrated.

Amanda has this to say about broth: “Bone broth is a food worthy of having in your kitchen all the time. To aid in your kitchen prep and your budget, consider keeping a crockpot dedicated to bone broth. You can have bones stewing all the time, adding vegetable scraps (and even new bones), as you have them. We often start with a fresh batch of bones and then take great care in using the first and second batches on special soups. The ‘first run’ broth will be the best and should be savored accordingly. As you get into your third batch and beyond, start using your broth to cook beans and rice. You will still get nutritional benefit from those bones, and the flavors in the beans and rice will help carry the dish. How many batches of great broth you get depends on the bones.”¹⁵

Either use the time-saving continuous method or make a big enough batch every couple of weeks so you always have fresh, homemade stock in the fridge and/or freezer. Ideally, consume this traditional restorative daily; with every meal is even better, particularly if you are dealing with digestive complaints, joint troubles or dental concerns.

SWEAT YOUR AROMATICS

Aromatics are flavorful, fibrous vegetables such as onions, leeks, garlic, celery, peppers and carrots. Sweating means slowly cooking finely chopped vegetables over a low heat in fat (especially butter) before adding any liquid; this softens their fibers, releases their juices, and concentrates their flavors. It is similar to sautéing, but the heat is lower and there is no browning or sizzling. This will create a richer tasting soup.

Cut your aromatics into small, uniform sized pieces, but not so small they begin to brown before being cooked all the way through. Add a pat of butter, splash of olive oil or ghee (maybe one tablespoon per two cups of vegetables), and a pinch of salt (to help the vegetables sweat). Remember, no sizzling or browning, which means the moisture is evaporating and the vegetables will caramelize, and some may develop a bitter taste. If this starts to occur, simply turn down the heat. Sweat your aromatics for about twenty minutes.

However, this is not a necessary step. All your vegetables can be simmered right in the broth and will make a perfectly fine soup. Sweating the aromatics will definitely give it a boost in flavor and richness, but do what works best for you.

On the subject of cooking, let's talk equipment. You will need a large soup pot, preferably one made from a non-reactive material. (See the article "Mad as a Hatter" at www.westonaprice.org by Kaayla T. Daniel and Galen D. Knight for more on the subject of non-reactive cookware). I own several Le Creuset enamel-on-steel pots, the largest for making stock and several smaller sizes for making big batches of satisfying and soul-soothing soup. Heavier, thicker bottomed pots are ideal for soup-making. Smaller pots are fine for experimenting with recipes, but when you are cooking soups, because they freeze so well, it is a shame not to make a large enough batch for a number of meals.

ADD THE REST

After cooking your aromatics, add longer-cooking vegetables (tubers, winter squash, roots, broccoli, etc.), raise the stove top up to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, for four to six minutes. Now is the time to add your homemade, healing bone broth. Increase the temperature so your concoction reaches a simmer. Once simmering, add the more quickly cooking vegetables (summer squash, greens, tomatoes, corn, etc.). Lower the heat, cover with a lid and simmer for the needed time. Stop cooking when all the vegetables are fork tender but not yet falling apart. Sautéing vegetables before adding your from-scratch stock-base will infuse your soup with a richer flavor, but it is certainly fine to cook them right in your stock. Frozen vegetables are also quick and easy to toss into a stock-base in the last minutes of cooking, especially if you are going to purée your soup. Add the final seasonings and done!

Legumes, lentils and meats all work for an endless array of yummy-to-your-tummy soups. Soups also offer a perfect way of making use of those otherwise-wouldn't-be-used ingredients. Depending on your soup, legumes and lentils can be either pre-cooked or pre-soaked and added into a long-simmering recipe (see the informative piece, "Putting the Polish on Those Humble Beans" by Katherine Czapp at www.westonaprice.org for maximizing the digestion of beans). Canned (with non-plastic lining) beans work nicely too. Meats are typically pre-cooked, but can be cooked right in the broth depending on your soup and the meat.

BE DARING

It is hard to mess up a pot of soup. Play around with different flavors and textures and don't forget to throw in some color, too! A little sweetness also makes soups more kid-appealing, so favor carrots, butternut squash or sweet potatoes when cooking with or for the little people in your life. Ferments go extremely well with soups—especially miso and the juice from fermented vegetables. Just don't boil away their probiotic goodness; instead, add them into the bowl when the soup is not too hot for your finger. Also remember the traditional-food standby: fat! Don't be shy with nourishing fats—toss in a good heap of butter, coconut milk, meat drippings or coconut oil.

In *Nourishing Traditions*, Sally Fallon Morell explains, "Most traditional soup recipes call for the addition of cultured cream in this way—to the slightly cooled soup in the bowl rather than in the pot. Here is another example of folk wisdom serving as a guide to healthy eating. Remember, if you can touch the soup with your finger and not be burned, the enzymes will survive. Do not hesitate to add cultured cream to your soup for fear of eating too much fat. It supplies not only enzymes but also valuable fat-soluble vitamins. These fat-soluble vitamins are what your body needs to utilize the minerals in the soup. Furthermore, cultured cream imparts a smooth texture and delicious taste,

ensuring that your soup will be eaten with relish by young and old.”¹⁶

Here is an off-the-cuff example from my own kitchen. After a family dinner, we had about a cup of sirloin steak left over. The next day for lunch I sweated some onions and carrots in a dab of ghee, added turkey bone broth I had in the freezer, tossed in the chopped sirloin morsel, crumbled dulse (seaweed), a dash of Himalayan salt, and some cooked quinoa I had in the fridge. Simple and so yummy!

THE GRAND FINALE

Leave it chunky or purée? That is the question! Chunky, meaty soups are filling and satisfying, but puréed soups are an especially wonderful way to get a whole host of vegetables into your family. Thicken them up with winter squash, potatoes (cooked along with the soup or leftover mashed), mashed cauliflower, or even blended cashews. An immersion blender is a must-have in the kitchen for easily blending soup right in your pot. While a blender or food processor will work, they are not nearly as efficient and are a bit of a nuisance to clean besides.

Fallon Morell goes on to say, “We urge you to make homemade soups a standard of your repertoire. With a judicious choice of ingredients, they provide nourishing, easily assimilated fare for young and old. Soup is the perfect way to get vegetables into those members of your family who normally turn up their noses at green things, or who may have trouble digesting raw salads.”¹⁷

Soup is the ideal one-pot wonder-meal, for breakfast, lunch, dinner or even as a side dish to warm the cockles of your heart and soothe worries away. The creativity and flexibility of soups make them ideal for cooks of any level of experience to take on. Fill your family’s tummies with delightful stock-based creations and watch your wellness soar!

SIDEBARS

BONE BROTH 101

The basics of broth making are quite simple. Always choose bones from humanely-treated, range-fed animals. To impart a richer flavor and color, first brown by roasting or sautéing the meaty bones from beef, buffalo and lamb on a heavy roasting pan in a hot oven at 350° or skillet on medium on the stovetop until nicely brown, but not burnt. Shin, shank, marrow, neck and oxtail have high amounts of connective tissue; knuckle bones are high in gelatin. You can skip this browning step, but you will sacrifice quite a bit of flavor.

In a big pot, cover your choice of bones, either chicken, duck, turkey, beef, buffalo, lamb, or fish, in cold filtered water with one to two tablespoons of apple cider vinegar per quart, which will help liberate the nutrients. If you have access to chicken feet, throw a few in, too; they are well-endowed with gelatin. I will often toss in some dried egg shells as well for added minerals. A good tip is to freeze the bones and cartilage left over from meals, such as roasted chicken or grilled fish, until you have enough for a batch of stock.

Leave your stock simple or add your choice of vegetables, such as carrot slices or tops, celery leaves, broccoli stalks,

and onion (these can be saved and frozen until needed from previous meal leftovers and trimmings; it matters not if they are limp and wilted). Herbs, such as basil and thyme, go nicely in stock as well. Cover all with a few inches of filtered water. Slowly bring the water to a simmer and skim the scum that rises to the top. Allow everything to simmer (with a gentle, periodic bubbling) up to 24 hours (less for smaller bones). A good clue for doneness: the connective tissue is gone if the bone breaks easily.

Finally, strain, cool, and voilà—homemade, super-food stock! Use it right away, freeze the extra, or chill it in the fridge and remove the fat that congeals on the top (you can use chicken schmaltz or beef tallow for sautéing or give it to the dog or chickens). The fat is fine to keep in the stock; it just depends on your culinary taste. Keep your delicious elixir in the fridge for several days or freezer for several months.¹⁴ Making a reduction, by boiling away the water, will create a concentrated stock to save room in your freezer.

A good sign you got the desired bang from your bones is when your stock has a jello-like consistency once it cools in the fridge. However, if this thicker texture doesn't happen, don't worry; it is still nutrient-dense. Use your stock as is, or cook the broth down to allow some of the water to evaporate, which will increase the gelatin-to-water content.

SOME SOUPY TIPS

- Avoid boiling soup; it will make your ingredients mushy. Keep it at a nice rippling simmer between low and medium heat to promote more flavorful soup.
- Add fresh herbs at the end of cooking; they lose their flavor with long cooking. Dried herbs work well in soups and hold their flavor better than fresh during longer cooking times.
- Most soups are even better the next day! The flavors have had more time to intermingle and harmonize. Seafood soups are the one exception to this rule.
- One teaspoon of sugar mellows the acidity of tomato soup.
- The sharpness of vinegar and lemon juice will lose impact when cooked for a long time, so add these at the end of the cooking process.
- Cream is less likely than milk to curdle and separate, and should be added into each warm, not overly hot, individual bowl.
- Lighter soups are easily bulked up with beans, grains and lentils.
- Soup is completely portable: rinse out a thermos with boiling water, pour in your soup and seal.

THREE PURÉED SOUPS

BUTTERNUT TOMATO SOUP

6 tablespoons butter

2 large onions, coarsely chopped

2 celery sticks, coarsely chopped

Two 28-ounce cans of diced or chopped tomatoes, or an equivalent amount of fresh or frozen tomatoes

1 medium-sized butternut squash, peeled, deseeded and diced

1 1/4 cup stock or water

4 ounces raw cream or whole milk

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
 2 fresh or frozen orange peppers, chopped
 Salt to taste

Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Cook the onions and celery for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until starting to soften. Stir in the tomatoes, squash and stock and bring to a boil. Turn down the heat and simmer for 30-35 minutes, until the squash is tender. Allow the soup to cool and use an emersion blender to purée until smooth. Gently reheat, stirring in the cream and grated cheese until just simmering. Remove from heat and season to taste.

RED PEPPER SOUP

2-3 tablespoons stable cooking fat (coconut, ghee, chicken schmaltz)
 2 red bell peppers, diced
 1 small onion, diced
 1 clove garlic, minced
 1 large potato, diced
 1 celery spear, chopped
 1 carrot, diced
 1 inch fresh ginger, peeled/minced
 2 cups chicken stock, plus water if desired
 1/2 bunch fresh cilantro, stems removed and chopped fine
 1/2 teaspoon each of fennel seed and cumin
 1/4 teaspoon each of turmeric and cayenne
 juice of 1/2 fresh lime
 salt/pepper to taste
 plain yogurt for topping

Heat fat in a large pot. Add onions and sauté until soft. Stir in fennel, turmeric, cumin and cayenne. Add all the vegetables (including ginger) and sauté for 3-5 minutes to start the vegetables cooking. Add the chicken stock, cover and let simmer until vegetables are soft. Remove from heat, add lime juice, and purée with an emersion blender (or in blender in small batches). If necessary, add water in spoonfuls to thin. Add salt and pepper to taste. Top with a dollop of yogurt and sprinkle with chopped cilantro. Recipe created by Dianne Koehler, nutritionist and WAPF chapter leader.

QUICK (NO TIME TO SWEAT) CREAMY BROCCOLI SOUP

6 cups chicken stock
 1 onion, chopped
 6 stalks broccoli
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon pepper
 1 teaspoon Herbamare (seasoned sea salt)
 1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese or another favorite
- 1 whole sweet potato

Simmer all ingredients except cheese until the vegetables are soft (around 30 minutes, until potato is fork tender). Use an emersion blender to purée and then stir in the cheese (or use blended cashews for a different taste or for dairy-free).

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