

Soups for Body and Soul

By Rebecca Snow, MS, CNS, RH (AHG)

I am excited to be a part of this great team of practitioners and teachers at the Well!! During these “colder” winter months, I wanted to share one of my favorite ways to consume herbs as medicine... soups!! Soups have been used as a food and a medicine for thousands of years, traditionally as a way to administer medicine and food. Basically a soup is like a fancy tea. It is a method of extracting the goodies from vegetables, herbs and spices. Soups are a perfect one pot meal for busy individuals; they can be brewed in a crockpot while you are at work. You can find some great soup recipes at www.epicurious.com.

Soups have many health benefits. Cooking predigests the food and herbs for easy assimilation, this can be particularly good for people who may have difficulty digesting food, with common symptoms of gas, bloating, and feeling tired after a meal. Soups also offer fluids to the transient water drinker. The warmth of soup can help to clear a congested nose and moisten the dry air in wintertime.

Broths have traditionally been used as a food during convalescence, for individuals who are recuperating from a surgery, trauma, or illness. The gelatin in broths, a byproduct of cooking animal bones, is rich in proline, lysine and glycine, conditionally essential amino acids. Broth consumption can improve collagen synthesis, bone mineralization, and has a sparing effect on protein utilization for people with low protein diets.

In general, it is best to buy the ingredients for your soups fresh and organic from the market. Canned veggies and soups are usually high in sodium, and may contain potentially harmful preservatives, such as bisphenol. Vegetable-rich soups can be a great source of fiber, antioxidants, and nutrients, vegetables are the most underutilized and reliable preventative medicine available! Listed below are other healing medicinal ingredients to include in your soups.

Medicinal Foods and Herbs in Soups

Garlic, *Allium sativum*: Garlic has diverse medicinal properties. Of the 32 clinical studies done on garlic all but 4 showed positive results for improving cardiovascular health, cancer prevention, circulation and immunity. Garlic has lipid lowering benefits, possible anti-atherosclerotic effects, and possible anti-hypertensive effects. It is a potent anti-microbial, the oils of which are secreted via the lungs. Garlic is safely consumed as a food, but should be avoided as a supplement for anyone who is taking blood thinning, prescription medications.

Shitake Mushrooms, *Lentinus edodes*: Shitake is the most commonly found (in grocery stores), medicinal mushroom in the west. Button mushrooms do not have many healing properties, but shitakes like maitake and reishi is one of the best-studied medicinal mushrooms. Research has demonstrated immuno-modulating, anti-viral, anti-bacterial, cholesterol reducing properties.

Astragalus, *Astragalus membranaceus*: Clinical trials have demonstrated that astragalus has health promoting effects in the elderly and individuals undergoing chemotherapy. Traditionally used to prevent colds and flus (not to be used during acute infection), trials have demonstrated and supported the use of Astragalus as an antiviral and immuno-modulator. You can cook the root in the soup or broth and remove before eating, similar to the way bay leaves are used.

Kelp, various species one favorite is *Nereocystis leutkeana* available from www.ryandrum.com. Sea vegetables are rich in minerals; they reduce the toxicity of radioactive chemicals and heavy metals in the body. Kelp is 50% by weight minerals. A good salt substitute, kelp is higher in potassium than sodium. Kelp is a great detoxifying agent, rich in immune building minerals such as zinc and selenium.

Wintry Immune Broth

You can clean out your fridge, and add lots of different veggies to this broth. Just don't forget the garlic, kelp, shitakes, and astragalus, the key immune building ingredients!!

6 dried or fresh Shitake Mushrooms (can also use Maitake or Hen of the Woods)
10 pressed roots of Astragalus
1 bulb garlic
1 onion chopped with skin
1 tablespoon Kelp powder
1 bunch leafy greens (I used kale)
3 cup any veggies (I used carrots and celery)
1 tablespoon any dried herb (I used a combo of bay leaf, oregano, sage, and parsley)
1 tsp dried powdered spice (I used a combo of cumin, ginger, and turmeric)
1 gallon water (can substitute some water with chicken broth)

Add all the ingredients to a big pot and simmer for 2 hours. Strain out the vegetables and herbs. You can drink as a hot beverage, add miso paste or liquid aminos as desired. This broth can also be used as the base to other soup recipes. I like to freeze several containers and defrost and use a little at a time throughout the winter.

Yummy Bioflavonoid Soup

6-8 servings

1 butternut squash
1 acorn squash
1 yam
1 stick organic butter
1 medium onion chopped
3 medium celery ribs chopped
1 medium leek chopped
3-4 cloves garlic minced
1 large carrot chopped
1 tblsp fresh ginger
1 tblsp dry thyme leaves crushed
2 quarts chicken stock
1/2 c heavy cream (optional)
salt and fresh pepper to taste, can use seaweed powder to substitute

1. Preheat the oven to 375. In a large roasting pan, toss the squash and yams with the 4 tblsp melted butter and a pinch of salt and pepper. Roast for 40 minutes. Stirring occasionally.
2. Meanwhile, melt the remaining butter in a large saucepan, add all the vegetables and cook over moderate heat, until the vegetables are just tender about 8 minutes. Stir in the ginger, thyme, yam, and squash. Add the stock and bring to a boil over high heat. Partially cover, reduce to moderately low heat, simmer the soup for 20 minutes, until veggies are very tender.
3. Working in batches - puree in blender. Return to saucepan, stir in the cream, season with salt and pepper. Reheat and garnish with scallions or chives.

Resources and References:

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