

CHICKEN SOUP – PENICILLIN IN A BOWL

Winter time is soup time – thick, hot and the ultimate comforter. They're easy to make and perfect for a quick lunch at home or taken to work or school in a thermos. They're cheap, so don't waste your money on the expensive ready-made ones, or even worse on any of the instant varieties which are nutritionally very poor.

Flu, cold, cough, sinuses, chest infections – forget pills, potions, nasal sprays and prescriptions, all you need is hot chicken soup. I'm not joking, this has been the traditional healing broth used by countless generations of wise Jewish mothers all over the world. Research doctors in Israel have even asked the World Health Organisation to add it to the List of Essential Drugs for infections.

Chicken soup is nourishing, healing, restorative and much more than old wives tales and folk lore. Modern science proves its worth. The soup contains a sulphur compound called cystine, which protects you against infections of the throat, sinuses and chest. Cystine helps by thinning mucous in the nose and lungs, making it much easier for the body to get rid of. It's good for asthma too.

Protein in the soup is very easy to absorb making it rapidly available so it's a perfect food if you are recovering from any illness. Anyone with poor immunity, chronic fatigue or exhaustion can also benefit from the vitamin and mineral content of chicken soup. As a bonus it's great for warding off the hangover after a night on the tiles. The nutrients make it Nature's miracle hangover cure.

Dr Stephen Rennard, Chief of Medicine at the University of Nebraska, has found that chicken soup is a good anti-inflammatory. Prof. Ziment at UCLA Medical School says natural chemicals released when cooking soup are effective against chest infections. Extra benefits come from using traditional

herbs and spices like garlic, bay leaf, thyme, rosemary and pepper which are medicinal.

There's nothing new about this kitchen medicine which was prescribed in the 12th century by the physician Moses Maimonides. He used the remedy specifically for asthma as well as colds, as inhaling the steam from the hot soup made breathing easier. A bowl provides 50% of a day's protein, 25% of potassium, 20% of selenium and 30% of vitamin B6. Don't wait till you're ill to enjoy it.

This recipe is cheap, easy and better than any ready made soup. Use leftover roast chicken, or a small fresh chicken cut in joints. You'll also need a large chopped onion, 2 sliced carrots, 1 sliced leek, 3 chopped garlic cloves, 1 tbsp olive oil, and 3 pints water. 1 bay leaf, a sprig each of thyme, rosemary and marjoram, ground black pepper and 1 heaped tbsp of thoroughly washed pot barley.

Heat the oil, add onion, carrot, leek and garlic, stir till soft. Add everything else, bring to boil and simmer for 90 minutes, skim off fat. Remove bones and serve with a chunk of wholemeal bread. If very fatty, refrigerate overnight and remove solid fat before reheating. Half an hour's work then left to cook itself - ten portions for less than the cost of a prescription. Is there better value for money?

Celtic Broth

Comforting enough for the hardy Scots facing their bleak winters, enjoy this energising soup.

1tbsp olive oil

50g/2oz porridge oats

1litre/1 and three quarter pints vegetable stock and semi-skimmed milk

500g/1lb broccoli florets

5 chopped spring onions

black pepper

nutmeg

1tbsp fromage frais

1tbsp chopped chives

Sweat onions in oil till soft. Add broccoli, stir for 2 minutes, oats, stir for 2 minutes then slowly stir in liquid. Simmer for 12 minutes, season, serve with a swirl of fromage frais and sprinkle of chives.

100 calories, protein, fibre, calcium, potassium, A, B and C vitamins, and low fat.

Spicy Garlic Soup

The ideal way to fight off winter bugs and deal with chest infections.

10 chopped garlic cloves

1 chopped onion

3tbspns olive oil

1tspn crushed aniseeds

two slices stale wholemeal bread

Sweat garlic and onion in oil until golden. Add aniseeds, stir for 1 minute. Add 1 litre water, bring to boil and simmer 10 minutes. Add bread and simmer 10 minutes till soup thickens.

100 calories, contains potassium, selenium, folic acid and powerful natural antibiotics. Valuable in cold weather as it reduces stickiness of the blood, so lowers risk of heart attack.

Leek and Potato

Potatoes are at their healthiest and most nutritious when eaten with their skin. This thick nourishing and warming soup is perfect comfort-food. If you want something really different, add a sprinkle of lavender flowers while it's cooking.

375g/12oz small new potatoes, unpeeled and quartered
1 large sliced onion
2 leeks, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
50g/2oz butter
900ml/1 and a half pints vegetable stock
150ml/quarter pint double cream
pepper
2tbsp finely chopped fresh parsley

Sweat garlic in butter, add leeks, potatoes, onions and cook for 10 minutes. Add stock, simmer for 20 minutes, liquidise, add parsley, pepper and cream.

160 calories, half a day's vitamin C, plus iron, zinc, selenium, iodine, folic acid and betacarotene. Wonderful in winter as leeks are a traditional treatment for sore throats and combined with onions, relieve coughs and colds.

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE AND LEEK SOUP

Nothing could be simpler or more delicious whether you eat it hot or cold and to turn this soup into a meal or a smart dinner party starter, add some mussels.

1 and a half lbs / 700 g Jerusalem artichokes, scrubbed, cut in half inch slices
1 medium onion, chopped
1 leek, washed and chopped
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
2 pints / 1.2 litres vegetable stock (home made or Kallo organic cube)

2 tbsp virgin olive oil
small knob of butter
2 bay leaves
black pepper
chives to garnish
parsley, finely chopped – if serving with mussels

Sweat the onions in butter and oil till just soft. Add the leek and garlic, stir gently for 2 minutes. Add the artichokes, stir for 2 minutes. Add pepper, bay leaves and stock, bring to the boil and simmer gently till all the vegetables are soft – around 10 minutes. Allow to cool a little before liquidising.

The soup should be fairly thick but if necessary thin a little by stirring in a little warm milk. Serve sprinkled with finely snipped chives.

Adding Mussels: Allow 4-5 mussels per person. Make sure they're all tightly closed and throw out any which don't close up when tapped on the worktop. Wash thoroughly in a sieve under running water and put into a large flat bottomed saucepan. Turn up the heat and cover. Within 5 minutes the shells will open and the mussels will be cooked. Throw out any that haven't opened. Put the soup into bowls adding mussels on top and sprinkle with finely chopped parsley.

Serves 4

Michael van Straten
Health Journalist of the Year 2004

www.michaelvanstraten.com

Join me on Classic Gold Digital Radio 11 a.m. Friday and 1 p.m.
Sunday.

Also on Talksport 4-5 a.m. Monday.