Soup – er Nutrition

What’s better on a cold winter’s day than a steaming hot bowl of your favorite soup? Soup can be a welcome change of pace after the rich high calorie foods we have during the holidays. Not only a nutritious boost, soups can help ease the budget as many soup recipes use little meat, and/or inexpensive dried beans as a protein source.

If you are trying to keep that resolution to lose the extra pounds that you gained over the holidays, studies have demonstrated that filling up on soup as an appetizer can help you eat less at the rest of the meal. Although perfectly fine to consume on occasion, canned soup is often high in sodium and low in vitamins, minerals and fiber.

If you have some extra time on the weekend, healthy soups can be made at home for pennies on the dollar. Here are a few simple tips to keep in mind:

Start with a lower fat base. Take your pick of chicken, beef, or vegetable broth. Creamy soups are higher in fat and calories than broth-based soups like minestrone or chicken noodle. Of course, cream-based soups are not off limits; if you want to make a creamy soup, simply swap a lower-fat alternative, such as 1% milk for heavy cream. One trick is to puree and mix in a can of mild-tasting white beans to thicken soup while adding fiber, protein, and other nutrients.

Besides fat, soups can often be very high in sodium. Choose low-sodium broth and add more spices to boost the flavor. Try coriander leaves, ginger, pepper, garlic or other spices to improve aroma and taste. Many of these spices even have antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties.

If you’re going to make a meal out of it, one of the best ways to make a soup heartier is to add healthy extras. Mix in your favorite fresh, frozen, or low-sodium canned vegetables. Vegetables are a great source of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. Besides being high in fiber, beans are also high in protein, which can help bulk up your soup. Aside from beans, add lean cuts of meat such as chicken and turkey. Ground turkey is a great substitute in chili as its leaner than the more traditional ground beef.

Many recipes call for ingredients such as cheese, sour cream, or bacon. Instead of adding these straight into the soup, use these sparingly as a topping or garnish to add a dash of flavor without all of the fat and calories. You can also choose healthier substitutes like reduced-fat finely shredded cheese or turkey bacon in place of regular. To substitute for full-fat sour cream, try lower-fat versions or even plain nonfat Greek yogurt. If you like to add crackers for crunch, try toasted whole wheat bread sliced into cubes or whole grain crackers.
Homemade soups are great because they can be made ahead of time in large quantities. You can freeze and enjoy the extra for more than one meal. Indeed, soups keep well in the freezer for up to 6 months. Just keep in mind that certain ingredients like potatoes and pasta may become mushy when thawing, so add these just before serving for the best texture.

Here is a recipe from the American Institute for Cancer Research.

**Mexistrone Soup**

*Ingredients:*

- 1 Tbsp. canola oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 carrot, sliced
- 1 large garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 small zucchini, halved lengthwise and sliced
- 1 cup yellow corn (no salt added), frozen or canned, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) stewed tomatoes with jalapeños*
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. dried basil
- 1 ½ cups spicy tomato juice
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup corn chips, lightly crushed, optional, for garnish

*Instructions:*

- Heat the oil in a medium Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Sauté onion and carrot 3 minutes. Add garlic and squash. Cook, stirring, 2 minutes.

- Add corn, black and pinto beans, stewed tomatoes with their liquid, oregano and basil. Pour in juice, and ½ cup water. Bring mixture to a boil and simmer 5 minutes. Season to taste with pepper and serve with corn chips, if using.

- Soup can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 2 days.

- *As a substitute for stewed tomatoes with jalapeños, sauté a finely chopped fresh jalapeño pepper with the vegetables.

*Nutritional Information:* Makes 6 servings.

*Per serving:* 167 calories, 3 g. total fat (less than 1 g. saturated fat), 29 g. carbohydrate, 7 g. protein, 8 g. dietary fiber, 610 mg. sodium.

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