

Pack Your Soup with Good Nutrition

Soup is one of the easiest most versatile foods to make and it is easy to pack in good nutrition. As a first course, soup can have a purpose. Because it is consumed slowly by the spoonful and generally hot, it reminds us to slow down, which is essential for weight management and good digestion. As a main course, soup can provide a meal in itself when full of vegetables, grains, beans, and/or meats. A whole-grain roll or bread completes the meal well.

Soup is extremely simple to make, but it requires some basic knowledge.

Basic Soup Types

There are two broad categories of soup: broth-based soups that can be classified as clear, thin, or thick, and cream-based soups.

Broth based soup characteristics: Vegetable, beef, chicken, or fish stock is used as the primary liquid.

Clear soups include bouillon, consommé, and broth.

Thin soups include those such as tomato, onion, noodle, and miso soups.

Thick soups are thickened with pureed vegetables, potatoes, or a starch, include chowders, minestrone, and squash soups.

The liquid in broth-based soups are somewhat clear, unless pureed vegetables are added. Broth based soups are lower in fat and calories than cream based soups.

Cream based soup characteristics: Cream soups and bisques are made by adding cream or milk to a white sauce, or pureed vegetables, meats, poultry, and/or fish. Cream based soups have a higher fat and calorie content due to the white sauce base and dairy ingredients.



Stock

Stock is essential for a good soup. It is the foundation of the soup and adds flavor to the ingredients. Stocks may be made at home or purchased. Purchased stocks come in condensed or ready to use forms. Look for low sodium stocks and broths and read the ingredient statement, a good quality product will list meat as a first ingredient. Recipes for stocks can be found in cookbooks and on-line. Chill and remove fat before using to control fat and calories.

Vegetables

Vegetables provide flavor and nutrients. One of the benefits of eating vegetables in soups is that water-soluble vitamins are retained in the broth. Cut root vegetables into bite-sized pieces, and simmer them along with the soup until tender.

The following vegetables can simmer for hours and just get better with time:

- Carrots
- Celery
- Garlic
- Onions/ Leeks
- Parsnips
- Potatoes
- Pumpkin
- Rutabaga
- Turnips
- Sweet Potato
- Beans
- Beets

Add the following cut vegetables to soup, but simmer for only about a half hour to make sure they keep their shape and texture. Frozen vegetables can be added with fresh ingredients.

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower

- Corn
- Eggplant
- Mushrooms
- Peppers

- Okra
- Spinach
- Tomatoes

- Kale and other hardy greens
- Fennel
- Zucchini

Legumes

Legumes add to a soup's heartiness while adding fiber and other beneficial nutrients.

Add any type of kidney or pinto beans, lima beans, lentils, fava beans, field peas, black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, chickpeas, or soybeans. Cook dried beans prior to adding to the soup. Purchase low sodium canned beans or add frozen beans after thawing. Beans can lose shape with extended cooking.

- Kidney beans
- Pinto bean
- Lima beans
- Navy beans
- Black beans
- Lentils
- Fava beans
- Field peas
- Black-eyed peas
- Cannellini beans
- Chickpeas
- Soybeans

Meat, poultry, and fish

When adding raw meat, poultry, or fish to your soup, it is helpful to follow a recipe to determine how long to cook the meat and when to add it. For example, shellfish may become tough if overcooked, whereas chicken may become stringy and fall apart.

Add cooked chopped meats when vegetables are added.



Grains

Grains are great additions to make your soup heartier and more satisfying. Whole grains add depth to the flavor of soup. Soup is an excellent use for leftover grains.

Cook grains before adding the grains to your soup, in order to keep them from sucking up the broth. Slightly undercook pasta and grains, because they will continue to cook and plump up in the soup. If adding uncooked grains to the soup pot, add extra water equal or up to, twice the amount of grain (for example for ½ cup brown rice add ½ to 1 cup hot water.) Consider the following these grains:

- Barley
- Orzo pasta
- Brown or Wild Rice
- Quinoa
- Couscous
- Macaroni, penne or cut spaghetti pasta

Spices

Herbs and spices contain compounds beneficial for good health and they can be the difference between a so-so pot of soup and a great pot of soup. Start with low sodium stock, season with spices, and then toward the end of cooking, adjust seasonings as needed.

Consider adding the following spices ½ way through cooking for variety:

- Turmeric
- Coriander
- Cumin
- Ginger
- Garlic, Fresh or Powder
- Black Pepper
- Paprika
- Curry Powder
- Crushed Red Pepper

Try adding the following herbs at the end of cooking for additional flavor:

- Basil
- Bay leaves
- Cilantro
- Dill
- Mint
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Tarragon
- Thyme

A few thoughts about soup

- Start with low sodium stocks and canned ingredients. Add spices half to three quarters of the way through cooking. Taste and adjust with salt as needed, toward the end of the cooking process.
- Smooth soups: If you prefer a smooth consistency, you can puree most soups by using an immersion blender or food processor
- Freezing soups: Most broth-based soups freeze well, so make a large pot of soup and freeze in individual portions
- Crock-Pot cooking: You can prepare most soups in a Crock-Pot, but you may need to experiment with cooking time and temperatures



Recipe for a quick pot of soup

Makes about 8 servings

- 1 medium onion chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 1 Tbs. canola oil
- Dash of crushed red pepper flakes
- 2-cups of frozen soup vegetables or frozen mixed vegetables of choice, thawed
- 1-cup low-sodium, diced tomatoes with juice
- 1-cup beans or 1 cup cooked grains
- 2-cups diced cooked skinless chicken, lean beef or pork
- 1-quart low-sodium chicken, vegetable, or beef stock (heat in microwave to speed process).
- 2-cups hot water as needed
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 1 tsp paprika (optional)

1. Heat oil in a soup pot and add crushed red pepper. When the pepper starts to sizzle add the onion and celery, sauté about 3-5 minutes until the vegetables are soft.
2. Add remaining ingredients up to the bay leaf.
3. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and add remaining spices then simmer for about 20 – 30 minutes. Stir to 2-3 times during cooking to prevent sticking.
4. Taste and adjust seasonings before serving

References and recommended readings

- Sheasby A. *400 Soups*. London, England: Anness Publishing Ltd. 2007.
- Sheasby A. *The Ultimate Soup Bible*. Cranbury, NJ: Metro Books. 2005.
- Brown, A. *Understanding Food Principles and Preparation* (2nd Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; 2004.