

Soups for whatever ails you this winter

By **GRETCHEN MCKAY**
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Chicken soup has long been touted as a soothing home remedy for the annoying colds and body-crushing flus of winter.

Filled with nutrients, a steaming bowl helps clear sinus congestion, and some research suggests it might also defend against infection. Chicken soup also makes us feel nostalgic — sipping a cup while curled up on the couch can feel like a big, embracing hug from someone you love, even if the noodle-strewn broth came from a can.

But what if you're kicking off the new year by going vegan for a month? Or maybe you're just resolving to eat less meat, opting instead for a diet that incorporates alternate proteins such as beans paired with a wide variety of vegetables. You're in luck, because soups made from veggies like celery, carrots, leeks, parsnips and/or onions can also make you feel better when you're under the weather.

"There's this aura around chicken soup and its special powers," notes Rachel Kurtter, a dietician and wellness coach for Highmark Health. Yet its restorative properties are not so much about any supposed "magical" powers as simple nourishment.

People tend to lose fluids when they're sick, and soup replenishes those losses, she says. It also does the body good by providing calories, proteins, and vitamins and minerals.

"At the end of the day, [soup] helps you hydrate and replace electrolytes," she says, even if you're only sipping a little at a time.

Antioxidants

Kurtter says no one vegetable rises above all others when making soup. Vegetables in general are naturally low in calories and important sources of essential vitamins and minerals. And many of the most popular ones that go into the soup pot — leafy greens, carrots, potatoes, cabbage and garlic — are also high in antioxidants, substances that may protect your cells against unstable molecules known as free radicals.

They're also loaded with



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

This nutritious vegetable soup is packed with kale, fennel and cannellini beans. Parmesan croutons add crunch.

polyphenols, plant-based compounds that help prevent disease and keep you healthy in a different way than vitamins, minerals or other nutrients. Spinach, red and yellow onions, shallots, potatoes, broccoli and carrots, which are all easy to find in winter months, are especially high in them.

"You want to eat a rainbow of colors," says Kurtter, because they all provide different benefits to the body in helping your immune system fight infection.

Carrots, for instance, not only add a touch of sweetness but are also a great source of vitamin A, an anti-inflammatory agent.

Kale contains high levels of vitamin C, which is thought to reduce the symptoms of a cold (though not the chances of catching one).

Fresh ginger, meanwhile, is effective against vomiting and nausea, and garlic has antimicrobial, antiviral and antibiotic properties.

This year's cold and flu season is expected to be more severe than the 2020-21 season, according to the Centers for Disease Control, because people are traveling again and fewer are social distancing and wearing masks. Flu activity in 2020 was the lowest since current reporting began in 1997, which is good but also bad, because it means we have less nat-

ural immunity against influenza this year.

To help whatever's bound to ail you this winter, we dish up three nutritious and nourishing vegetarian soups that are easy to make with easy-to-find produce and pantry ingredients.

And going forward? Kurtter recommends supporting your immune system all year round — and not just when you're sick — by eating a balanced diet, getting a good night's sleep and managing stress by finding time in each day to unwind, "even if it's just for 5 minutes."

"It will help you be healthy all year," she says.

CHICKPEA NOODLE SOUP

This vegetarian take on chicken noodle soup is healthful and hearty. White miso, a fermented paste made from rice, barley and soybeans (and found in the Asian section of some grocery stores), adds a mild umami flavor. If you can't find it, substitute a splash or two of soy sauce. The parsley relish adds a spicy finish.

For soup

Extra-virgin olive oil
3 sprigs thyme (or teaspoon herbes de Provence)
1 yellow onion, sliced thinly
1 leek, sliced thinly and rinsed of dirt
4 garlic cloves, minced
Kosher salt

chopped carrot, celery and onion and sauté gently. Add the ground beef, mix well and cook until it is brown and "sizzles." Add the wine, mix gently and cook until it has completely evaporated, about 2 minutes. Add tomato sauce, cover and simmer slowly for about 2 hours, adding broth when needed. When sauce is just about done, add milk to reduce the acidity of the tomato. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Prepare the dough by mixing eggs, flour and the boiled spinach, squeezed well and finely chopped, until a ball of dough forms. (I used my stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment.) Continue to knead for 3 minutes, either by hand or in the mixer, so the dough develops elasticity and silkiness.

Cover dough ball in plastic wrap and let it rest at room temperature for 30 minutes before using. Or let the dough rest for up to 24 hours in the refrigerator.

Roll out the dough, which must be light green and not excessively thin. (I used a pasta maker, working my way down through the settings, but you can also roll out the dough by hand.)

Put a pan three-quarters full of salted water on the stove and bring it to a boil. Cut the pastry into rectangles or squares (mine were about 3 by 5 inches), throw

1 cup white wine
2 tablespoons white miso (or liquid aminos)
2 carrots, peeled (or scrubbed) and diced
2 medium parsnips, peeled and diced (or swap in sweet potato)
1 medium rutabaga, peeled and diced (or swap in turnips)
1 small celeriac head, peeled and diced (or 3 stalks celery, sliced thinly)
2 cups (or one 16-ounce can) cooked chickpeas
4 ounces pappardelle or fettuccini

For parsley relish

1 ½ teaspoons red pepper flakes
Zest and juice from 1 lemon
10 sprigs parsley, roughly chopped

In a soup pot, heat a glug of olive oil over medium heat. Add the thyme (or herbes de Provence) and briefly fry, 10-15 seconds.

Add onion, leek and garlic, plus a big pinch of salt, and reduce heat to medium-low. Sweat the mixture until soft, about 7 minutes. Add white wine and reduce by half.

Dissolve miso into 8 cups of water. If it doesn't blend completely, don't worry, it will as the soup simmers — this just helps it along.

Add root vegetables, chickpeas and miso water. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook until all vegetables are tender, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small frying pan, lightly toast red pepper flakes over medium-high heat until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

In a separate bowl, combine ½ cup of olive oil, lemon zest, lemon

juice, parsley and a pinch of salt. Add warm red pepper to the mixture.

When the vegetables are tender, taste and adjust salt as desired. Add the pasta and simmer until tender, 6-8 minutes.

Divide the soup into 4 bowls and top with a hefty spoonful of the parsley relish.
— food52.com

CARROT SOUP WITH GINGER

Ginger root has long been used as a herbal remedy for colds to soothe sore throats and cough, and also can fend off the nausea that comes with the flu. It's paired here in a warming vegetarian soup with carrots, which, thanks to a high level of vitamin C, can help your body build antibodies and boost your immune system.

Like most soups, this keeps well in the fridge for a few days. Make it a full meal by serving with a salad and hearty, buttered toast.

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup chopped yellow onion
3 cloves garlic, smashed
2 heaping cups chopped carrots
1 ½ teaspoons grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar or orange juice
3 to 4 cups vegetable broth
Sea salt and fresh black pepper
1 teaspoon maple syrup, optional
Coconut milk for garnish, optional
Pesto for garnish, optional

Heat olive oil in large pot over medium heat. Add onions and a generous pinch of salt and pepper and cook until softened, stirring occasionally, about 8 minutes.

Add smashed garlic cloves and carrots to pot and cook about 8 minutes more, stirring occasionally. Stir in ginger, then add apple cider vinegar. Add 3-4 cups broth, depending on your desired consistency. Reduce to a simmer and cook until carrots are soft, about 30 minutes.

Let cool slightly, then transfer to blender. Blend until smooth. Taste and adjust seasonings. Add maple syrup if desired.

Serve with a drizzle of coconut milk on top and/or a dollop of pesto, if desired.

Serves 4.
— loveandlemons.com

KALE, FENNEL AND WHITE BEAN SOUP

If you like greens and beans, you'll love this soup. It's quick to pull together and because of all the leafy greens, it will fill you up with all kinds of nutrients. Don't worry about rinsing the beans,

advises Milk Street chef and author Christopher Kimball. The starchy liquid that clings to them lends body to the broth.

I used a baguette for the croutons, and curly kale instead of lacinato (Tuscan) kale.

8 ounces rustic bread, torn into bite-sized pieces
4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese, divided
2-inch piece of Parmesan rind, optional
1 medium red or yellow onion
1 medium fennel bulb, trimmed, halved lengthwise, cored and sliced ½ inch across the grain
1 bunch kale, stems removed, chopped and reserved, and leaves roughly chopped
2 tablespoons tomato paste
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
½ cup dry white wine
2 sprigs thyme
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes, or more to taste
15-ounce can cannellini beans, drained but not rinsed

Heat oven to 375 degrees with rack in middle position. Distribute bread on rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Toss, then bake until browned and crisp, about 10 minutes, stirring once halfway through. Remove from oven, sprinkle with about half the Parmesan and toss; set aside.

In large pot over medium, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil until shimmering. Add onion, fennel, kale stems and ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables soften, about 5 minutes. Add tomato paste and garlic. Cook, stirring until paste begins to brown and stick to the bottom of pot, about 1 minute. Add wine, thyme and pepper flakes, then cook, scraping up any browned bits, until liquid has almost evaporated, about 2 minutes.

Stir in beans, kale leaves, Parmesan rind (if using), 5 cups water, 1 ½ teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon black pepper. Bring to a simmer over medium-high, then reduce to medium and cook, uncovered and stirring occasionally, until kale is very tender, 20-25 minutes.

Remove and discard thyme and Parmesan rind (if used). Taste and season with salt and pepper. Ladle soup into bowls, top with croutons and the remaining Parmesan. If desired, drizzle a little oil on top.

Serves 4-6.

— "Milk Street Vegetables" by Christopher Kimball (Voracious, November 2021, \$40)

LASAGNA

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CLASSIC LASAGNE ALLA BOLOGNESE

The Italian Academy of Cuisine added this recipe for Green Lasagna alla Bolognese to its archives in 2003. It features green pasta noodles made with spinach, a classic Bolognese ragu, bechamel sauce and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

In the original Italian instructions, cooks are cautioned: "Be careful that the layers are very regular, the sauce is abundant, but not excessive, the béchamel is creamy and evenly distributed. Let it rest for five minutes before serving; the portions on the plate must be strictly standing."

I made the pasta from scratch using thawed, frozen spinach (squeezed between a clean dish towel to remove the moisture), but it's OK to substitute dried noodles. Cook until al dente, or about 1 minutes less than package instructions. To keep them from sticking while you assemble the lasagna, lightly rub each piece on both sides with a little vegetable oil.

Its delicate layers of fresh pasta and two sauces made this lasagna a rich and tasty delight. It does take some time, however, so you may want to make the sauce in advance to speed the process.

For bolognese sauce
5 ounces porchetta or bacon
2 tablespoons butter
2 ½ ounces finely chopped carrot
2 ounces finely chopped celery
2 ounces finely chopped onion
11 ounces ground beef
½ cup red wine
10 ounces tomato puree
Beef broth
1 cup milk
Salt and pepper

For pasta
12 ounces flour, preferably "00"
2 eggs
7 ounces boiled spinach, squeezed well and chopped

For bechamel
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3 cups whole milk
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg

Prepare bolognese sauce: Dice the bacon, chop it and fry in a large Dutch oven until crispy. Add 2 tablespoons butter and finely

from forming. Keep warm until ready to use.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Grease the bottom of the pan liberally with butter. Line it with a layer of pasta followed by a layer of meat sauce, bechamel sauce and a sprinkling of grated cheese.

Continue layering with pasta, sauces and cheese until you run

out of ingredients (I had enough for 6 layers.) Add a small piece of butter in each corner of the pan to keep the edges from drying out.

Bake for about half an hour in preheated oven. Allow to sit for 15 minutes before serving.

Serves 6-8.

— Adapted from Accademia Italiana Della Cucina

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