**Soup for the Winter Soul**

On a never ending quest to beat the winter chill? A steaming bowl of soup can do just the trick to dazzle your palette and warm your belly, all while preventing an expanding waistline. Soups are a wonderful way to increase your vegetable intake, add in whole grains, and provide a low calorie meal option. In addition, soups save well and can therefore provide tasty leftovers for days at a time.

Here are some important tips to remember when preparing your next soothing winter soup:

1. Limit heavy creams and butter – many soups can lose a lot of their nutritive benefits as well as add unneeded calories and saturated fat by calling for large amounts of cream and butter. Instead, opt for water or broth based soups. By adding spices and more veggies, the flavor isn’t lost and you’ll reap the health benefits.
2. Try adding whole grains – often when preparing soups at home we forget about whole grains. Adding whole grains gives soups more texture, heartiness, and the added fiber from whole grains helps to keep you full longer without adding lots of calories. Great whole grain options for soups include: barley, quinoa (white, red, and brown), millet, oats, and rice (long grain, brown, or black). Each of these add unique textures and flavors to your soup – have fun and play!
3. More veggies – when looking to create more of a stew or add heartiness to your soups, veggies are a great way to add robustness to your recipe. Not only do vegetables provide unique flavors to your soups, but they also deliver a diverse array of nutrients that support your health. And, soups can be a delightful way to sneak in vegetables for picky eaters! Some particularly wonderful veggies to add to soups include: sweet potato, butternut squash, parsnips, rutabaga, turnips, tomato, leeks, potato, carrots, and many more!
4. Make soup in bulk – don’t miss the opportunity to save yourself time later on in the kitchen. Soups generally save incredibly well, and most soups are also freezable, so when going to the effort to make soup, be sure to do it in bulk. That way if you need an easy lunch or are pressed for time at the dinner hour, you always have a quick, healthy meal the entire family will enjoy.

**Creamy Sweet Potato Soup**

*Ingredients*

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 small onion, diced

1-2 teaspoons salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 shallot, diced

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

2 cloves garlic, chopped

3-4 sweet potatoes (about 2 pounds), peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

4 cups low sodium chicken (or vegetable) stock

1 teaspoon paprika

*Directions*

1. In a large pot, heat oil over medium heat. Add onion and shallot, and season lightly with salt and pepper. Cook until translucent, about 5 minutes.
2. Add garlic and cook 2 more minutes, until fragrant.
3. Stir in sweet potatoes, stock, cinnamon, and paprika. Bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes. (Sweet potatoes should be very tender.)
4. Using a blender, stick blender, or food processor, purée mixture (in batches, if necessary). Return mixture to the pot. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

**Easy Winter Barley & Bean Soup**

*Ingredients*

4 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

1 medium fennel bulb, cored and chopped

5 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon dried basil

1 15-ounce can cannellini or other white beans, rinsed

1 14-ounce can fire-roasted diced tomatoes

6 cups low-sodium vegetable broth

¾ cup quick-cooking barley

1 5-ounce package baby spinach (6 cups)

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

¼ teaspoon ground pepper

*Directions*

1. Heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion, fennel, garlic, and basil; cook, stirring frequently, until tender and just beginning to brown, 6 to 8 minutes.
2. Mash ½ cup of the beans. Stir the mashed and whole beans, tomatoes, broth and barley into the pot. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the barley is tender, about 15 minutes. Stir in spinach and cook until wilted, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat and stir in cheese and pepper.