

## No. 5: Let the Sunshine Soup

Spring is sort of here. Last weekend it was sunny for a bit but as I look out of the window now it's grey and raining. While the sun is struggling to make a more regular appearance take matters into your own hands and make this soup which will brighten any day even before you've eaten it. The combination of pumpkin, butternut squash and sweet potato give it the most glorious sunny yellow colour that you'll know by now must contain masses of anti-oxidant vitamins and therefore be very good for you indeed (see Top Tips recipes No. 2 if you need to catch up). Of course pumpkins are more autumnal than spring so if you can't find them don't worry, it doesn't really matter which combination of the three you use, vary it with the seasons, it'll still taste good.

I've added sweetcorn and butter beans to give interesting added texture and flavour as well as adding an extra portion of veg. with the sweetcorn and protein with the beans. Even without the chicken it's a complete meal.

The first time I made pumpkin soup was using a couple of small home grown pumpkins that I'd won in a village raffle. It was so good I went to the local supermarket and bought another big pumpkin to make some more. I put all the same ingredients in but it was rubbish. It went in the bin. I could tell the difference just cutting the pumpkin up. The small home grown ones were really hard work whereas the supermarket one cut easily – presumably because it was mainly water, which was what the resulting soup tasted of. So the moral of this tale is: the harder it is to make, the better it will taste in the end; the meaning of life in a bowl of soup. I am very deep.

If you are using chicken and are still in any doubt about the real value of buying a good quality free range bird go back and read Newsletter No: 4. As revealed by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in one of his River Cottage programs, intensively reared chicken can have up to 10 times as much fat in its meat (equivalent to eating a hamburger) and 100 times less Omega 3. Not really the healthy option we were hoping for. The quality of the meat on a grain fed chicken that has been raised in a barn with just about enough room to stand is kind of similar to a person who lies on the sofa all day eating pizza. Buy better quality meat and eat less of it.

You'll need a hand blender or liquidizer for this recipe and if you haven't got one it's well worth the investment. I prefer to use a hand blender because you can just stick it in the pan of soup and you're done. Once you've got a

blender you can make soup out of any vegetables. Follow the same pattern as below by softening the veg. in a little butter or olive oil then adding stock. Just experiment, you can't really go wrong.

## Ingredients

**1 ½ pints chicken or vegetable stock** (I find Knorr concentrated bottled stock very good if you don't have fresh)  
**675g/1 ½ lb mix of peeled and cored pumpkin, butternut squash and sweet potato** (whatever you can find)  
**25g/1 oz butter**  
**½ an onion**  
**1 large cooked chicken breast** (optional)  
**225g/8oz canned, frozen or fresh sweetcorn cut from the cob**  
**1 tin butter beans** (washed and drained)  
**Salt & Pepper**

## Method

1. Melt half the butter in a large pan.
2. Chop the onion and fry gently in the butter for about 5 minutes.
3. Chop the pumpkin, squash and sweet potato into 2-3 cm pieces and add to the pan with the rest of the butter.
4. Stir until the butter is melted and the vegetables are coated. Put a lid on the pan and 'sweat' the vegetables in the butter for about 5 minutes stirring occasionally.
5. Pour in the stock, bring up to the boil, cover and simmer for about 15 minutes until the vegetables are completely soft.
6. Remove from the heat. Let it cool a little and then blend until smooth.
7. Return to the heat. Cut the chicken into small pieces and add it and the sweetcorn and butter beans to the soup. Simmer for about 10 minutes until the chicken is heated through.
8. Season to taste.

## Soup – The Science Bit

The name of this soup comes from the colour of course but if I was being really clever I could also say that it was because all those **anti-oxidants help protect your cells from the UV sun damage** that leads to skin cancers and aging (which they do). I'd still recommend that you apply your factor 15 though. Its good stuff this soup, but not that good.

**Vegetable soups have a great Nutrition/Energy ratio** being high in vitamins and minerals and relatively low in carbohydrate and fat. They give you a great hit of nutrition for relatively few calories, a much, much better ratio than any sandwich, pie or pasty that you could pick up. Even if you can't resist the sandwich or pastry, *still* have the soup as well. It'll help restore the balance of the meal (half of everything we eat should be fruit and veg. - Al's GP 1) and it'll be longer before you are hungry again and reaching for the next too tempting treat. Most of the calories/ carbohydrate in the soup comes from the vegetables so they tend to have a low Glycaemic index and **release their energy gradually helping you balance you blood sugar and maintain your energy levels.**

**Liquid foods like soup have been found to be better at alleviating hunger than dry foods.** In studies, people who ate most of their food in liquid form consumed fewer calories than those who ate solid food. The extra water content may help to make you feel fuller and more satisfied.

Vegetable soups are also **great fibre providers** and because they also provide water are great for keeping you regular without having to invest in silly little pots of yogurt at ridiculous prices.

**It's best to reheat your soup on the hob** rather than in the microwave as the superheating it gets in the microwave destroys more of the vitamins than conventional cooking. That said, if you are reheating this at work and you only have a microwave still go for it. Even micro-waved I reckon this will still do you more good than eating a sandwich.

## Top Tips

Vegetable soups like the one above are a fantastic way of making sure that half of everything you eat is fruit and veg. and help you get to your 8-10 portions a day (Al's Guiding Principle No.1). A decent sized bowl of vegetable soup counts as at least 2 portions. Here are soup related top tips to make living healthily easier....

- **Freeze home made soups in old large yogurt pot** and store until needed. They can be carried to work frozen without risk of spilling and heated up for lunch instead of, or in addition to, your sandwiches to increase your daily veg. count.
- **Invest in a food carrier Thermos**, they are easier to wash out than a drinks Thermos. Heat your homemade soup up while you have your breakfast (can be from frozen see above) and then take it with you when you go out for the day.
- **Search for the soups in train and motorway service stations.** I've found that even when there is nothing else healthy available there is usually a fresh vegetable soup on offer somewhere. Many larger train stations now have franchises that serve mainly soups (Souper Douper being one) and several of the other companies now do at least one soup (Eat & Camden Food Company are good). Small train stations often have the 'Pumpkin' chain and I had a huge cup of fabulous fresh, hot, vegetable soup from there recently when all the other food they had on offer was baked and brown. Most motorway service stations now also have a big soup pot somewhere – an oasis of nutrition in a desert of chips, burgers, bread and limp lettuce.
- **Choose soups with the highest vegetable content in the ingredients list** to maximise the benefit. Tomato soups are especially fabulous as cooking tomatoes actually increases the available nutrition. Remember that potato does not count towards your fruit and veg. total as it has a relatively poor Nutrition/Energy balance and that mushroom is a fungus and therefore a protein source and not actually a vegetable. That said, if these are all that's on offer they are still likely to be a more nutritionally balanced option than any other fast food out there so go for it.
- **Have veg. soup as a starter** for your evening meals at home or choose it in restaurants. You'll add a couple of veg. portions to your daily count, eat less of the main course and certainly in restaurants it's likely to be one of the lowest calorie and lowest fat starters.

- *Keep a pot of soup in the fridge and heat a cup as a snack when you get peckish. Much better to snack on this than bread, crisps or biscuits.*

And finally I've discovered this trick this cold, cold winter when I seemed to spend far too much of my life in cold stations craving hot coffee and my caffeine intake was getting a little out of control.

### **Toppest of the Top, Top Tips**

- *Next time you are wandering around looking for a Costa or Starbucks look for somewhere that sells cups of soup instead. **Substitute your frothy coffee, sugar laced frappuccino or hot chocolate for a warming, satisfying cup of vegetable soup** and increase your veg. count, decrease your caffeine intake and substitute milk and sugar calories for vegetable calories. You are also likely to stay fuller for longer so are less likely to snack and may even eat less at your next meal. Surprisingly you may find the nutrition kick from the vegetables is just as good at raising your energy levels as a caffeine kick and soup is friendlier and won't drop you down again when it's done with you like caffeine and sugar. They are around the same price. What's not to love?*