

Keeping warm this winter with soupy goodness!

Most people are aware of the fact that in order to achieve better health the regular consumption of fruit and vegetables are essential. However, the majority of South Africans do not achieve the recommended daily intake of at least 5 portions of vegetables and fruits (400g). Studies that investigated the reasons why South Africans do not eat their "Five a Day" revealed that availability and taste preferences, especially among children and in some cases men, are the main reasons why these goals are not achieved. Soup is a wholesome to beat the winter blues, block out the big chill and assist you in achieving your recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables.

Consuming more vegetables will warm your heart in more way than one. Here's how: researchers have found that the frequent consumption of vegetables (particularly dark green and orange varieties) may be protective against heart disease. The reason why we should also be rabbiting on about vegetables this winter is that the vitamins such as folic acid, minerals such as potassium and fibre found in vegetables are known to lower blood pressure and reduce blood levels of homocysteine, an amino acid that is known to damage coronary arteries. It is therefore not surprising that the WHO (World Health Organisation) predicts that up to 2,7 million lives could potentially be saved on an annual basis if fruit and vegetable consumption increases! What's more, some studies suggest that the consumption of more than 400g of fruit and vegetables a day increases life expectancy.

For those who are young at heart and not so concerned about heart health it is good to know that vegetables are an important source of carotenoids that the body is able to convert to vitamin A. Vitamin A receives the thumbs up this winter in that it is responsible for boosting the immune system and fighting infection. A true bonus for the kids who are always down and out with the winter sniffles!

Research conducted in France investigated the relationship between soup consumption and the body's folic acid, beta carotene, vitamin E and C status. The above researchers found that the impact of soup consumption on vitamin intake is substantial. In heavy consumers of soup (those that eat soup on most days) soup contributed to nearly 13% of their beta carotene intake as well as 4-5% of their vitamin C, vitamin E and folic acid intake. These results may be related to the fact that soup consumers eat more fruit and vegetables.

But wait, there is more. Heavy consumers of soup, i.e. eating soup at least five times a week is associated with a greater chance of having a weight that is within a healthy range, whereas regular consumers of soup (3 – 4 times a week) also seem to have a weight that is closer to normal. A study conducted amongst Portuguese adults also found that the consumption of vegetables and vegetable soup decreased the risk of obesity in males and females. A

possible reason why soup can assist in winning the battle of the bulge is that soup leads to a reduction in hunger and increases fullness that is comparable to that of solid foods. Another reason why trimmer waistlines are associated with soup consumption is that energy intake tends to be lower on days of soup ingestion. This phenomenon can be by the fact that an estimated 15% reduction in kilojoule (energy) intake at supper occurs if lunch consisted of a chunky soup. This however does not mean that eating soup causes weight loss. It merely means that vegetable soups are a satiating food and as such can help in curbing appetite.

The question that now arises is which soups are the best for one's health? Answer: the vegetables that have been identified by research as being the most protective against disease include onions, carrots, dark green vegetables such as spinach and tomatoes. In fact, the consumption of tomato products are associated with a reduced risk of heart disease and several cancers. It is thought that lycopene, the red pigment that gives tomatoes their brilliant colour, may be responsible for this relationship. Research has shown that a single daily serving of a processed tomato product such as tomato soup, significantly increases the body's lycopene levels. So why not treat yourself to a delectable butternut, minestrone or chunky vegetable soup this winter?