

# Cold Days, Warm Soups

Nutrition Notes by Natalie

The cold days of winter can make it difficult to do most anything, including getting out of bed. Isn't it just so warm and snuggly under those layers of insulated blankets and comforters? Well, hopefully you have a nice automatic heater or a lovely roommate or spouse that can brave the cold mornings and wake up before you do to get the house moving in the right temperature direction. For me, I have to give myself a pep talk just to get things rolling in the morning. I have to admit, once I am up, it only takes me 5-10 minutes to be so glad that I made the leap. One of the things that motivates me the most (and I know you have heard me talk about my love for this before) is knowing that there is a warm beverage waiting for me. Since giving up coffee (well mostly), I have embarked on a green and black tea exploration. My most favorite discovery this season has been a drink that I stumbled upon called a "London Fog". It is essentially earl grey tea mixed with half water and half milk and steeped to perfection. Some places add vanilla flavoring to this drink, but I opt for honey (or even monk fruit) to sweeten mine. It is truly a delight and definitely the highlight of my morning routine. On cold days, however, it may take a little more than a warm beverage to keep our bodies warm all day. This is where hearty soups can join in on the fun.

Soups are defined as a liquid dish typically made of meat, fish, or vegetables in a stock or water. From chilis to stews, to basic cream and broth based, soups have been around for ages and can really make cooking a simple task that is both nutritious and delicious. Step one, get a crockpot! These too have been around forever. The benefit to the crockpot is that while you are sipping your warm morning beverage you can be creating your afternoon or evening meal. Once you turn it on you literally can "fix it and forget about it".



What goes into the perfect pot of soup?

1. **STOCK** - Vegetable, Beef, Chicken broths or water.
2. **VEGETABLES**- Garlic and onion are great starters for any soup. Carrots, celery, potatoes, and anything else you like, can be added as well.
3. **PROTEIN**- You can add any kind of cooked meat like chicken, beef, pork, or turkey. OR you can choose vegetarian options like beans, lentils, or even tofu.
4. **SEASONING**- Your seasoning should be based on your ingredients. There are no-salt seasoning mixes available, as well as individual herbs and spices that deserve a little experimentation, as well. If you are a novice in this area, I recommend buying a herb and spice seasoning book that will help you pair your foods to their complementary spices.
5. **COOK**- Preferably on low all day, or crank up that crockpot (or stovetop) to high for a few hours, if pressed for time. Add creams to make it a cream based soup at the end.

Here's a favorite recipe of mine:

## Potato Leek Soup

- 4 medium to large peeled and cubed potatoes
- 2- 14 ½ ounce cans of chicken broth
- ½-1 cup leeks or diced onion
- 1 cup half and half (or reduced fat milk)
- ¼ cup butter (optional)

Add all ingredients, except half and half or milk to a crockpot. Cook on low for 8-10 hours or high for 4-6 hours until potatoes easily break apart with a fork. Use a stick blender or pour into a mixer to puree. Add the half and half or milk and cook on low for an additional 30 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste and sprinkle with chives and a dollop of sour cream or Greek yogurt (Greek yogurt adds protein).