

Get smart with comfort food

As you settle into winter's dark, deep nest, it's a given that eating well will present some challenges. For sure, the colder weather, shorter days and that serious back-to-business-as-usual attitude that shows up like clockwork every January 2 can make days a little more stressful and the desire for warm comfort foods a lot greater.

There are lots of good food choices out there that can satisfy, nourish, comfort and yet not wreak havoc with your health and waistline. Here are some of my picks for the season.

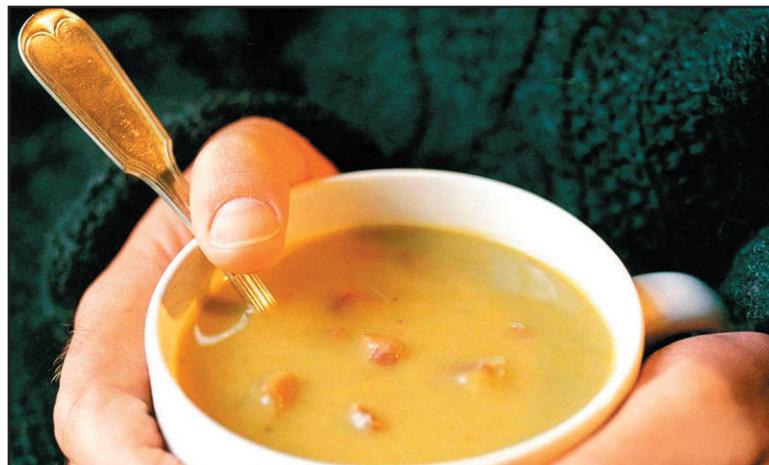
LENTILS AND LEGUMES:

Foods like kidney beans, black beans and chickpeas are a wonderful part of hearty stews and soups. They are rich in fibre, protein, B-vitamins, calcium, potassium, iron as well as disease fighting plant chemicals. Canada's Food Guide recommends hav-

ing meat alternatives such as beans and lentils often to help minimize the amount of saturated fat in your diet. You can stock your pantry with cans of beans or buy them in packages. The canned varieties are higher in sodium, so look for reduced sodium varieties or rinse them before using.

SOUPS: Made of seasonal vegetables, soups are wonderful for keeping warm and also for weight management. Starting your meal with a hearty bowl of soup will fill you

up so you are able to eat less of the main meal. I love soup in the winter and always have some in my fridge or freezer. I often have it as a snack when I come in from the cold and find it one of my good comfort foods. I've always cautioned people about the high sodium in canned soups, but now there are lots out there that are lower. Campbell's has reduced



A hot bowl of soup is perfect for a snack when you come in from the cold.

the sodium in many of their brands and they still taste great.

WINTER VEGGIES:

Winter squashes and sweet potatoes — those delicious orange foods that are wonderful in soups, stews and side dishes — provide beta-carotene, an antioxidant with can-

cer fighting properties as well as potassium, some B vitamins and fibre. Canada's Food Guide advises having at least one serving of bright orange vegetables in your diet every day as a way to ensure getting enough vitamin A. A ½-cup serving of baked acorn squash has 61 calories, 2 grams of fibre, 45 mg cal-

cium and more potassium than an orange.

If your comforts include casseroles like macaroni and cheese, lighten them up by using low fat cheeses and low fat milk. You can also add in vegetables like onions or tomatoes to boost the flavour and nutrition.

Don't bypass the frozen fruit and vegetables at the grocery store. These foods are picked at their peak of ripeness, frozen quickly and have a high nutritional value. They provide variety all year round as well as making it easier to get your recommended servings of this important food group. Filling up your plate with a variety of vegetables is another wonderful way to eat fewer calories at a meal. I buy frozen blueberries all winter and it gives me good thoughts of warm summer days.

A box of Clementines doesn't last very long in my home. Each one has only 35 calories as well as vitamin C, folate, fibre, potassium and protective plant chemicals.

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Pet whisperer lets every dog have its say

JOANNE RICHARD
Sun Media

My dog is telepathic but I haven't been listening.

Seems Mugsy wants a new striped-rainbow collar, white bowls and the occasional neck massage. And she also requested more fun and games, and a big birthday bash would be nice.

That's not all.

According to animal communicator Sheila Trecartin, my red-haired poodle fancies dark-haired male dogs, and patterned sweaters too, instead of the solid ones she's wearing. And ditch the booties, and my hand cream too — she says it tastes bad.

And all this time I thought she only had Milkbones on her mind.

Animals communicate telepathically, says Trecartin, who relays their thoughts, feelings and wishes to owners by feeling their pet's energy. Animals are eager to connect, says Trecartin, and Mugsy was no exception.

On Mugsy's wish list: A visit by someone with "the name (sounds like) Joan." Could it be my mother-in-law Jeanne, who visits often from Windsor?

"She says people should realize that she (the dog) understands what is being said, she understands even when they just think it..."

Sheila Trecartin

Mugsy also wants a yard. The truth is she doesn't have one! Our large backyard isn't fenced so she can't frolic freely outdoors. Plus she wants more attention from a brown-haired person who's recently become pre-occupied and is experiencing left-ear problems. Me! Mugsy also communicated a recent job offer — right again!

There were some uncanny accuracies, and whether you believe in this stuff or not, it's sure entertaining and outright curious.

I often wonder what Mugsy is thinking, so I turned to Trecartin to bridge the communication gap between us. I emailed Trecartin scant information — Mugsy's name, age and breed (she's a standard poodle) and her photo.

When animals speak, Trecartin listens, including dogs, cats, horses, pigs, cows, reptiles and birds. She's even communicated with a monkey, and regularly communicates with her pet turtle, Pedro. She's been channeling animal communications for years to offer a deeper understanding and connection between owners and their companions around the



Joanne Richard with her pet poodle, Mugsy. She recently found out that Mugsy is telepathic.

world, including South Africa, Australia and Korea.

"Everything has energy and when I'm able to tune into the energy, I can connect with the animal," says Trecartin, adding that non-verbal messages are exchanged telepathically through thought patterns and feeling sensations.

"They're actually much more intelligent and advanced than we are — when they meet someone they already know what's on their mind and their thoughts," says the Thornton, Ontario, resident.

The holistic healer has been talking with the animal kingdom since childhood. "I enjoyed sitting for hours exchanging thoughts and feelings with any animal I came into contact with," but she suppressed her telepathic abilities because she "didn't want to be viewed as crazy."

She started doing readings eight years ago and since then, Trecartin, who is also a certified reflexologist and a Reiki master/teacher, has read thousands of animals.

Given the right mindset and training, she says owners can learn to communicate with their pets too and reap a richer, deeper connection — she holds workshops for pet owners who want to explore their telepathic abilities (sheilatrecartin.com).

Rae Graham sought out Trecartin when her dog, Bear, started acting very strange and depressed. Much-loved treats and walks were being ignored. Vet tests showed nothing.

Bear communicated to Trecartin that he's experienc-

ing headaches. He questioned why he's not allowed to drink the cold water from the small stream near his home.

"The dogs will take off at any chance and run to the ravine behind my neighbours' houses," says Rae.

Bear also communicated that Graham's "heart is hurt from the actions of a female." At the time of the reading, Graham says she was "upset about something going on with a female in my life whose actions have hurt me. I couldn't believe the communicator picked up on this."

Meanwhile, the fact that Trecartin picked up on Mugsy's allergies to cleaning products and that chicken upsets her stomach amazed me.

Mugsy also mentioned she wants to play hide-and-seek food games more often. Actually, it is her favourite game! "She suggests you hide treats around the house before you leave so she has something to do for a bit while you are gone," reports Trecartin.

That's not all: Mugsy wants me to know that her feelings get hurt easily. "She says people should realize that she understands what is being said, she understands even when they just think it..." Well, stand in line, Mugsy! Two hyper-sensitive alpha females already live here.

I'm surprised she didn't mention that too.