

BEST EVER WINTER
LUNCHBOX
IDEAS





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Many people find it much harder to eat healthily in the winter compared to the summer months. There are so many reasons for this.

I wonder what resonates most with you:

I love salads, but not in winter. Once the threat of having to get into my swimsuit (or skimpy summer clothes) has gone, I'm less motivated to eat healthily. Winter makes me feel like eating loads of carbs. I can't think what to have.

What else do you notice in yourself during winter?

This mini guide is designed to give you some seasonal inspiration and prove that winter lunchboxes don't have to be all about sandwiches! All recipes have been created by a qualified Nutritional Therapist.

SOUPS

A warming soup is just the thing for chilly winter lunches, either enjoyed with a wholemeal roll, a few oatcakes or alongside a seasonal salad.

Here are a few of my favourites.

Chicken & Vegetable Soup

INGREDIENTS

25g butter
1/2 an onion, chopped
2 large carrots, chopped
3 celery stalks, chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
125g green beans, cut into 2 cm lengths
4 sprigs of fresh thyme
450g chicken breasts, chopped
Sea salt and black pepper, to taste

METHOD

Melt the butter in a large pan over medium heat and gently fry the onion, garlic, and chicken for about 5 minutes, until the onion is translucent.

Add the carrots, celery and green beans, thyme leaves, and enough water to just cover the vegetables (about 1.2 L).

Bring the water to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes.

Thai Pumpkin & Coconut Soup



INGREDIENTS

4 tbsp oil of your choice
4 small onions or large shallots, roughly chopped
4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
4 cm root ginger, peeled and finely chopped
2 red chillies, finely chopped (depending on choice of heat)
1 kilo of fresh pumpkin or butternut squash, deseeded
510 ml chicken or vegetable stock
2 cans of coconut milk
1 pack of fresh coriander
Zest and juice of 2 limes
Fresh coriander and finely chopped
Fresh chilli, to serve

METHOD

Heat the oil gently in the pan and add the onions, chilli, garlic and ginger with a pinch of salt and some fresh ground pepper.

Cook gently for 5 minutes, then add the pumpkin, stock and fish sauce. Cook for another 10 minutes then add the coconut milk. It seems like a lot, but you do need both cans!

Simmer for another 15 minutes then stir in the lime zest and juice.

Add most of the chopped coriander, then, when the vegetables are soft, blitz with a hand blender or liquidise in batches in a food processor.

Check the seasoning and serve with chopped coriander and chilli.

Red Pepper & Lentil Soup

INGREDIENTS



200g red lentils
2 tbsp olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
1 tsp crushed chillies
1 tsp hot smoked paprika
4 red peppers, deseeded and diced
1 litre vegetable stock
1 tbsp sherry vinegar
½ tsp stevia
4 tbsp natural yoghurt

METHOD

Rinse the red lentils in a sieve, then leave them to soak in a bowl of cold water while making the rest of the soup. Gently heat the oil and fry the onion in a large pan until soft. Add the garlic and red chilli for 2 mins and then the sweet smoked paprika for a final minute along with a splash of water to stop the spice from sticking.

Add the red peppers and cover for 10 mins until beginning to soften, stirring occasionally. Drain the lentils and add them to the pan along with the vegetable stock. Cover, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 mins until the lentils begin to break down.

Reserve one third of the soup to one side and blitz the remainder with a hand blender or in a food processor until smooth. Return the blitzed soup to the pan and stir. Season to taste with a splash of sherry vinegar and the sweetener. Swirl in a little natural yoghurt to finish. A little garlic and herb soft cheese (instead of the yoghurt) adds a wonderful creamy feel.

Carrot, Cumin & Quinoa Soup

INGREDIENTS



½ onion
100g quinoa
1 garlic clove, crushed
500g carrots, chopped
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp hot smoked paprika
½ tsp chili powder
1 litre of hot veg stock
100g feta cheese, crumbled
2 tbsp pumpkin seeds, dry roasted in a heavy frying pan
Fresh coriander, to serve (optional)

METHOD

Warm through 2 tbsp olive oil, then add the onion and garlic. Cook on a gentle heat, without colouring, for about 5 mins. Add the cumin, paprika and chilli, a splash of stock and then the carrots. Stir in the spices and add the rest of the stock along with 500ml of boiling water from the kettle. Cook the quinoa separately in boiling water, for about 8 mins (or according to the instructions on the packet), then drain and set aside. Let the soup bubble for about 10 mins. Meanwhile, lightly toast the pumpkin seeds in heavy frying pan. Take care not to burn them. They will start to pop and splutter – cover with a lid at that point and turn the heat right down, then off.

When the carrots are tender, take the pan off the heat and blitz the soup with a hand blender, adding a little more water if it's too thick.

Check the seasoning, then add the quinoa and stir gently. Ladle into warm bowls and crumble on the feta, sprinkle on the seeds and garnish with coriander and a grind of black pepper.

SALADS

Don't save salads just for summer months. Winter salads can be hearty, filling and just as delicious

What will you add to your lunch box repertoire?

Roasted Red Pepper, Blue Cheese & Lentil Salad

INGREDIENTS

2 red peppers, deseeded and chopped
50g rocket leaves, washed
1 apple, cored and chopped
75g Roquefort cheese
50g hazelnuts
1 tbsp maple syrup
1 tsp cumin
3 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp cider vinegar
1 tsp mustard
Sea salt and black pepper

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Toss the peppers in 1 tbsp of olive oil, spread on a baking tray and roast for 30 mins until soft. Toast the hazelnuts in a dry frying pan until fragrant and set aside. Wash the rocket and transfer to a salad bowl. Add the chopped apple, crumble the cheese over the salad. When the peppers are ready, transfer to a separate bowl and mix with the maple syrup and cumin. Leave to cool a little. Use the remaining ingredients to make a dressing and pour over the salad. Toss. Roughly chop the hazelnuts and sprinkle over the salad.

Quinoa salad

INGREDIENTS



90g (uncooked) quinoa, rinsed in a fine sieve
1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 medium cucumber, chopped
1 medium red pepper, chopped
1 small red onion, finely chopped
a handful of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
60 ml olive oil
60 ml lemon juice (about 2 to 3 lemons)
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
2 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
½ tsp fine sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

METHOD

To cook the quinoa, put the rinsed quinoa in a pan with 500 ml water. Bring to the boil, then simmer until the quinoa has absorbed the water (about 15 mins). Remove from the heat, cover, and leave to rest for 5 mins to give it time to fluff up.

In a large serving bowl, combine the chickpeas, cucumber, bell pepper, onion and parsley. Set aside.

In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar, garlic and salt. Whisk until blended, then set aside.

When the quinoa is cool, add it to the serving bowl, and drizzle the dressing over the top. Toss until the mixture is thoroughly combined. Season with black pepper, to taste, and add an extra pinch of salt if necessary. For best flavour, let the salad rest for 5 to 10 mins before serving.

Add any additional protein you choose, from salmon or tuna to feta.

This salad keeps well in the refrigerator, covered, for about 4 days. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

Butternut Squash Falafels

INGREDIENTS



Extra virgin olive oil
1 butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cut into chunks
1 tsp each cumin and coriander seeds, gently toasted in a dry pan until fragrant
1 tsp ground cinnamon
2 garlic cloves, peeled
3 tbsp freshly chopped coriander
Squeeze of lemon juice
4-6 tbsp gram flour (chickpea flour)

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 200° C. Toss the butternut squash with some olive oil and salt on a baking sheet.

Roast in the preheated oven for about 30 mins or until the squash takes on a little colour and is cooked through. Meanwhile, using a pestle and mortar, pound the cumin and coriander seeds until finely ground. Add the cinnamon, garlic and a good pinch of salt and pound again to a paste.

When the squash is cooked, remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly. Leave the oven on.

Put the squash in a mixing bowl and mash with a fork. Transfer to a sieve to drain off any excess water for a few minutes. Put back in the bowl, add the spice mix, the coriander and lemon juice and mix together. Add the gram flour a tablespoon at a time until the mixture is still quite loose and sticky but holds its shape when scooped out.

Using your fingers, take small scoops of the mixture and shape into falafels. Roast in the oven for about 15-20 mins, until they take on a bit of colour and firm up. To serve, arrange the falafel on a dressed salad. Leave the falafels to cool if you are using in a packed lunch.

NOTE: Falafels are delicious served warm or cold, in a wrap with grated vegetables and hummus. A great source of protein as they're packed with chickpeas and your kids won't even know it!

Prawn & Tuna Fried Rice

INGREDIENTS



- 1/2 tbsp coconut oil or cold pressed rapeseed oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- ½ tsp chilli flakes or fresh chilli, deseeded & finely diced
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 cm root ginger, chopped
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and chopped
- 200 g cauliflower rice
- 100 g prawns
- 100 g tuna, tinned
- 1 tbsp Thai fish sauce
- 200 g Chinese vegetables or cabbage, diced
- 2 eggs, beaten
- handful coriander, torn

METHOD

Heat the oil in a wok and fry the onion, chilli, garlic and ginger for 1-2 minutes before adding the red pepper and after 4-5 minutes the cauliflower rice. After a couple more minutes, stir in the prawns, tuna, fish sauce and the Chinese vegetables or cabbage. (If using fresh prawns, cook them until they are pink before adding to the wok.)

Continue to fry gently for another few minutes. Finally, make a well in the centre of the wok to scramble the eggs. Stir them through and garnish the dish with the coriander.

DON'T FORGET THE LEFTOVERS

Last night's leftovers are perfect to bring to work if you have a microwave. They save time and money, too

Crunchy Winter Slaw

INGREDIENTS



200g carrots
¼ of a red cabbage
1 small/medium beetroot
3-4 radishes
3 tbsp mixed pumpkin, sesame and/or sunflower seeds
3 beetroot tops or kale leaves
small bunch of parsley
1 lemon, lime or 2 tbsp of Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV)
Olive Oil or Sesame oil for Asian twist
2 tbsp chickpeas or red kidney beans – optional – adds bulk for more substantial side dish.

METHOD

Coarsely grate the carrots into a bowl and finely shred the red cabbage. Dress with a splash of olive oil and a squirt of lemon juice or ACV. Slice the radishes and add them to the top.

Toast the seeds in a dry pan until they brown just slightly. Add a pinch of chilli flakes if you like. Grate the beetroot and add it to the carrots, but only mix just before eating. Shred the leaves and roughly chop the parsley. Add to the carrots and beetroot, mix and top with the seeds.

Add the chickpeas or kidney beans if using. Toss to coat with the oil and a rest of the lemon or ACV.

NOTE: Perfect as a side dish to practically anything – like the falafels you saw earlier!