

Start it with soup

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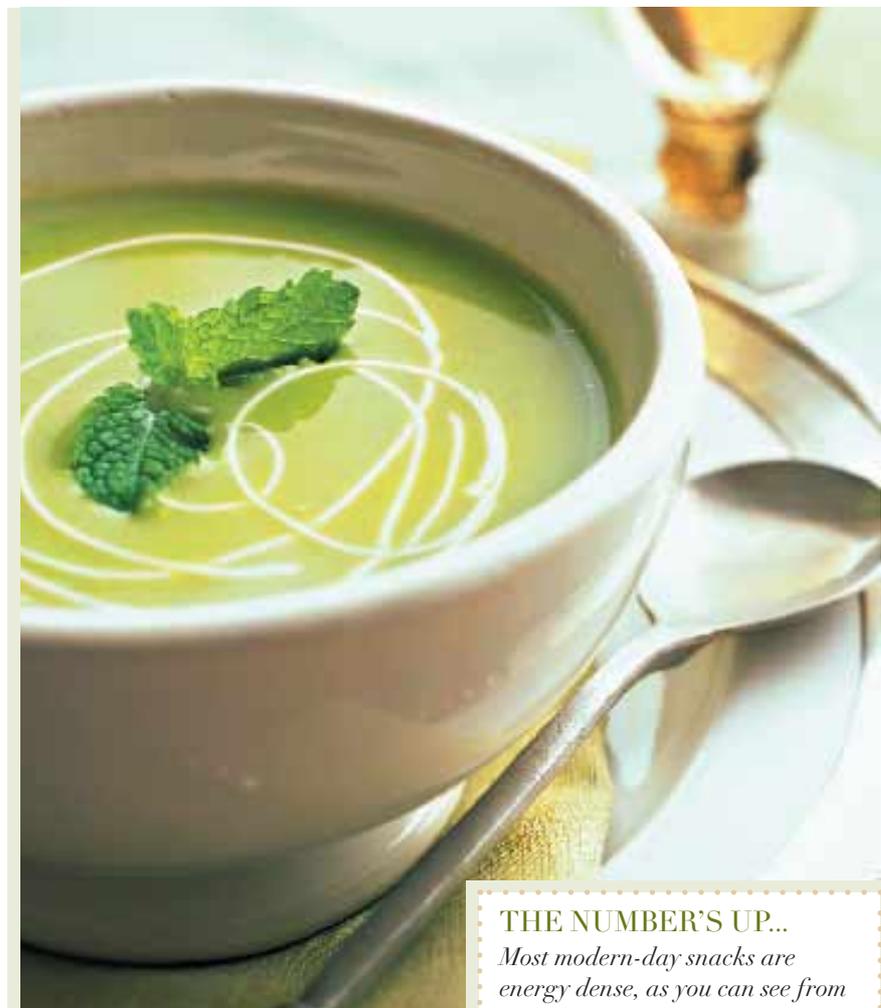
Tempting to tastebuds, filling and nourishing, soup has emerged as a fat-fighting star

Remember the Kick-Start Soup Diet that was all the rage last winter? You start by making a pot of vegetable soup, and live on nothing but that for the first week. Then you gradually introduce one 'normal' meal into each day, but stick with soup for the other two meals and whenever you feel hungry (which is probably quite often!).

Soup remains the magic bullet; hot and filling, it has virtually no fat or kilojoules and it's high in fibre, so you can eat as much as you like. This Soup Diet (in truth, a revamped version of an earlier, equally-popular cabbage-soup diet) is far from balanced. Rather, it's a last-minute measure to lose those extra kilos before a wedding, or to kick-start your diet before switching to a long-term and more balanced eating plan. Despite protests from dietitians, the Soup Diet captures the minds of many, and it was one of those instant successes, driven by the nightly current affairs TV programs. But shortcomings aside, the Soup Diet does highlight one thing – soup is a filling and satisfying food, with research that backs its powers to both satisfy and help slim down.

Souped-up research

Over the past 10 years, Dr Barbara Rolls, Professor of Nutrition at Pennsylvania State University, has studied how soup helps diet efforts. She's found that dieters who eat soup as the first course in a meal will consume, on average, 400 fewer kilojoules (100 calories) in that meal compared to those who don't start a meal with soup. In another US study, dieters who lost



weight on a low-kilojoule diet that included soup considered soup a valuable part of a weight-loss program that helped them to cut back their consumption.

Why soup works

Like salad, soup is a food classified as 'low kilojoule density' or 'low energy density'. Soup is big on volume (largely water and fibre) but low in fat and kilojoules – even those finished off with cream. Because it's largely water, a cup or bowl of soup might add anywhere from 250 to 700 kJ to a meal, which is quite low. On the other hand, chocolate has a high kilojoule density as it packs 2160 kilojoules into a 100g bar.

By filling up on soup as a starter, you feel full and cut the total amount of food eaten during a meal. As we tend to eat the same volume of food at each meal, it makes sense to stick to foods with less kilojoules if you want to shed excess weight. Fat content is one determinant of kilojoule density, but water and fibre are also important as they contribute volume. The more water and fibre, the less room for fat or carbohydrate. So why not just drink a glass of water with

THE NUMBER'S UP...

Most modern-day snacks are energy dense, as you can see from these kilojoule counts per 100g

Premium ice-cream	1160
Doughnuts	1560
Choc-chip biscuits	2095
Chocolate	2160
Potato crisps	2195

In contrast, most (but not all) basic foods have a low energy density

Vegetable soup	220
Fruit	230
Potato, boiled	280
Yoghurt, full fat	405
Fish, grilled	520
Steak, grilled	740
Bread	1020

food? Interestingly, Barbara Rolls' team tested this theory too, finding that while this may decrease feelings of hunger during a meal, the effect is not maintained after a meal. But water incorporated into food does. So a bowl of chicken and rice soup reduces the intake of subsequent meals more effectively than eating chicken and rice with a glass of water. As part of a balanced diet, soup emerges as a star. ►