

Chicken Soup for the Body: A Flu-Season Sampler

by Stef

Rarely a day goes by for me lately that someone isn't forwarding an e-mail or passing around a paper at work with some sentimental schlock about "10 ways to say thank you," or "my parents' lessons about marriage," or even "what my dog taught me about friendship." With the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* publishers churning out sequels faster than hens lay eggs (there's over a dozen titles now including *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*, *the Surviving Soul*, and *the Pet-Lover's Soul*), I'm beginning to wonder whether we aren't being drowned in anecdotes and metaphors as a substitute for true conversation about the complexities of life and relationships. And—ever the vigilant diner—I also fear that the healing power of a real bowl of chicken soup is getting overlooked in this allegorical frenzy.

So with winter coming on and the sniffles going around, I thought a quick survey of some chicken soup options around Ann Arbor might make us all feel better. Keep these soup purveyors in mind if you want to pamper a flu-ridden friend with take-out or need a warm, easy meal. One caution: many of these locations make different soups each day, so call ahead to be sure chicken soup is available when you want it.

Zingerman's Delicatessen (422 Detroit, 663-3354)

Any day of the week, you can get a chicken broth at Zingerman's that may be the most therapeutic version in town. A friend of mine swears by its restorative powers. But it won't knock your socks off as an amazing bowl of soup. This austere preparation is probably best consumed when you're seriously ailing or as a stock to something else you might be making at home. Paul Saginaw of Zingerman's claims that the secret to their broth is the "necks and bones." He explains that it's made by cooking down the chicken and vegetable parts that are not used in other preparations at the deli and then straining the liquid. What you get is a brown, slightly thick broth with no visible ingredients but a subtly rich flavor. They purposely don't season it, so that if you use it as stock, more cooking won't concentrate the salt. If you take it out to eat as soup, you might want to add some salt and pepper and maybe a little herbs (and don't be surprised if you refrigerate it and it becomes gelatinous). You can also order it with noodles or matzo balls, and when served with a hunk of Zingerman's bread all for only \$2.00, it may be one of the cheapest lunches in town.

Metzger's (203 E. Washington, 668-8987)

Chicken soup just happened to be the soup of the day the afternoon I stopped in at the bar in Metzger's German Restaurant and ordered a bowl to go. I smiled when a man sitting alone with the Sunday paper overheard my request and told the bartender, "You know, that sounds good. Bring me one too." I doubt he was disappointed. Metzger's chicken noodle is a classic, with tender pieces of chicken (big enough for a knife and fork), curly egg noodles, and plenty of carrots, celery, and onion. The broth is rather clear and somewhat oily, but not too salty. In fact, the taste of celery dominates, which isn't my preference (celery and I just don't enjoy each other's company), but it reminds me of how chicken noodle soup is supposed to taste. This is a good soup to have when your flu begins to subside and your appetite returns, but you still don't trust your stomach to behave. (Cost: \$2.40 a bowl)

Produce Station (1629 S. State, 663-7848)

The Produce Station just recently began making chicken noodle soup available every day by packaging their housemade soup in re-usable plastic containers to take home and re-heat. They also have rotating flavors of hot soups at their salad bar; chicken soup is available there about every ten days. Similar in appearance to the version from Metzger's, this soup differentiates itself with al dente vegetables; in fact, the onions were still slightly crunchy. This approach emphasizes each vegetable's taste, which included parsnips in the preparation I tried. Parsley also flavored the mix, giving an overall impression of a fresh, simple soup. "It's one of our most popular soups," says Produce Station's Brad West. The only drawback to the prepackaged version was that it can only be bought by the quart for \$6.49.

Stucchi's (1123 S. University, 662-1716)

Though mostly known for ice cream, Stucchi's soup and sandwich lunches are an easy option if you're near campus, and their chicken noodle soup is just fine. I especially enjoyed the thick, chewy noodles, almost dumpling-like, which make this soup more filling than other versions. The vegetables and chicken were cut small and, unlike others, included dark meat. If you're eating on the premises, I warn you not to burn your tongue; Stucchi's soup was served very hot. Just

soup with Saltines is quite affordable at \$1.85 for a cup or \$2.30 for a bowl. But they'll tack on another \$1.45 to add a slice of Zingerman's sour-dough bread.

Busch's Valu Land (2240 S. Main, 998-2666)

No, I'm not recommending the Campbell's aisle. Busch's has a huge salad bar that includes self-serve, fresh-made soups. On the day we visited, they had a tasty chicken with wild rice and Italian herbs. One medium-size cardboard container with plenty of meat and broth cost \$2.50. It was more fatty and salty than the other versions we tried, but that added to its flavor appeal. The chicken and vegetables were small but not invisible, and the rice made it hearty. Busch's soups are a good last step back from illness to a normal diet.

So, there you are. If you're under the weather this winter, get some chicken soup to go and escape from the vagaries of life under a warm blanket. But, if you're feeling perfectly well, why not take a friend out for a bowl of warm soup and a real heart-to-heart about each other's joys and sorrows? It'll go a lot farther toward building your relationship than all the sappy soup for the soul you can swallow.

Note: Thanks to my dear friend, Elizabeth, for helping me research this piece. ☑