Doctors’ Soups

AIDS researchers prescribe their favorite Rx for nutritious, satisfying one-bowl meals

April 1, 1997 By David France and Sandy Langley

In which our authors review the newest medicinal formulas from some of the top AIDS researchers in the nation-their highly guarded soup recipes. After a tasting, the pots were stirred in an online chat.

You’re a scientist, Dr. Langley-tell me what your research has taught you about thick and nutritious soups.

Honey, I can talk about Tickle Me Elmo frenzy and ritonavir nausea at the mall. But I’m a social scientist, not the lab-coat kind. Last week I was teaching Little Tyler the color green using a basket full of brightly colored condoms at the Community Health Project. Does that count?

I’ll start, then (if you don’t mind me taking this from nuts to soup), with a word about my research methodology. I called a dozen top AIDS researchers with the following proposition: Reveal the formula for your favorite soup. And guess how many scientists had their secretaries tell me they were too busy “researching” to comply? William Paul’s assistant at the Office of AIDS Research, for example, nicely explained that the doctor was out of the country and “as of right now he does not have a recipe to contribute.” As of right now? So I said, “We’re in no hurry,” and that was three months ago.

I didn’t even get an assistant when I called Robert Gallo at his new lab. And I called three times. I thought it would be funny to ask him for a split-pea soup, and compare it with Luc Montagnier’s--a cookoff for the feuding scientists.

I wanted *Time*’s “Man of the Year” David Ho to do a virus-clearing chowder. But the assistant said no, naturally, adding: “Dr. Ho doesn’t know anything about this very important topic.” A far more honest response, if you ask me, than Dr. Mathilde Krim’s “I’m much too busy to help”-when what she undoubtedly meant was, “I couldn’t find my way to my kitchen if the rest of the house were on fire.” And believe me, I’ve been to that sprawling townhouse and can attest the kitchen looks completely unused, except maybe for arraying the Chinese food on serving platters. (Did I tell you she keeps crystal glasses filled with filtered cigarettes all around?)

At least they’re filtered. Did they say AmFAR on them?

Affinity cigarettes? That would be very funny-a good idea for DIFFA, maybe.

Did I tell you about the study I'm enrolled in that's about women with HIV and their cervixes? The private investigator is Mary Ann Chiasson, the assistant commissioner of NYC's Department of Health. One year, they sent all the subjects calendars, suitable for hanging in our office cubicles, that actually said "Happy Holidays From the Cervical Disease Study!" prominently on the bottom.

So festive and intimate.

Yeah, but at least Dr. Chiasson returned my call and revealed the secrets of her stew. Progresso clam chowder with a shot of sherry. That's my kind of scientist-soup from a can and not afraid to admit it.

New England or Manhattan?

New England. Personally I can't stand either type.

You've heard of Dr. Jim Oleske, right? That amazing guy from United Hospital Medical Center in New Jersey with one of the largest pediatric HIV caseloads in the country? This is a sad story. I called him for a recipe, and he was incredibly gracious, but said he only eats TV dinners. "I can tell you a soup I wish I could make," he said pathetically. "It would be a sloppy split-pea soup with great big chunks of croutons and big pieces of ham and carrots-but I don't get to eat like that much, unfortunately."

That's so pitiful. Doesn't the Pediatric AIDS Foundation take him out to dinner every once in a while?

Oh! Did you see that Paul Michael Glaser remarried? Elizabeth, who started the foundation, has already been dead for two years. And the new Mrs. Glaser-wow! She's that former Jon Peters Entertainment exec who was charged with sexually harassing a female assistant-making rude comments about the size of her breasts, etc. Los Angeles magazine called her "mean" and "relentless." Isn't that strange? At the wedding, she reportedly said, "I think this is what Elizabeth would want." Unbelievable.

Well, maybe Elizabeth would have wanted it that way. Maybe she did give her blessing for him to find a new soul mate (as I did to my husband and the father of my child back in the pre-protease days, when my death was imminent and profitable).

He must have known her before, don't you think? I was a widow for two years before I did any serious dating, if you don't count the whore, the priest and the shrink (I know now that they were my form of self-help).

You had a priest?

Girl, nothing is hotter-not even a rabbi, I attest with authority. He had Jesus paraphernalia all

around his bed, including an illuminated Infant of Prague! Can you imagine it? He was completely closeted and used to get out of bed to work on his sermons. Anyway, we've gone from soup right back to nuts!

You're right. Soup is a serious topic and shouldn't be polluted by such girl talk. Truth be told, I'm not much of a soup person. My husband can't stand this about me. He's soup's biggest fan, and often speaks wistfully of tossing stuff in the Crock-Pot and having nutritious, satisfying one-bowl meals.

Tell the truth, girl: You don't like cooking much at all, do you?

That's unfair. I cook! It's just that I prefer recipes from the same cookbook as Dr. Krim-the one that promises 20-minute delivery.

Dr. Anthony Fauci's Escarole and Meatball Soup

When Dr. Fauci, head of the National Institute for AIDS and Infectious Diseases, was a little boy growing up in Brooklyn, he learned this recipe from his Italian grandfather. On a cold winter day, Dr. Fauci likes nothing more.

Info: Serves 10-12; calories: 300; total fat: 18 g; saturated fat: 7 g; carbohydrates: 15 g; protein: 20 g; cholesterol: 82 mg.

1 head escarole
2 carrots, peeled and diced
4 32-ounce cans chicken broth
1 pound ground beef
2 eggs
11/2 cups bread crumbs
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
salt and pepper to taste

To make the meatballs, combine ground beef, eggs, salt and pepper, bread crumbs and cheese. Roll into balls about the diameter of a nickel. Cook escarole and carrots in 2 cups boiling water for 10-15 minutes, then drain. Heat chicken broth to a boil. Add vegetables and meatballs and simmer on low boil for half an hour until meatballs are cooked through.

Dr. Marshall Glesby's Mom's Potato Onion Soup

Dr. Glesby, the medical director at Community Research Initiative on AIDS in New York City, knows of no formal study of the medicinal makeup of his mother's soup. He only knows that, growing up on the Canadian tundra, it was his favorite winter treat.

Info: Serves 6-8; calories: 148; total fat: 6 g; saturated fat: 4 g; carbohydrates: 18 g; protein: 5 g; cholesterol: 21 mg.

4 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed
4 onions, diced
21/2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
21/2 cups milk
1/2 teaspoon celery salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons parsley

Cook potatoes with onions and 11/2 teaspoons salt in boiling water until tender. Drain, but save liquid. Put potatoes and onions through ricer or mash. Melt butter in double boiler and stir in flour until smooth. Then stir in 1 cup of liquid from the potatoes. Continue cooking until mixture is thick. Stir in milk, pureed potatoes, onions, remaining teaspoon salt, celery salt and pepper. Mix thoroughly with eggbeater or whisk. Top with parsley right before serving.

Dr. Walt Odets' Empathetic Chicken and Matzo-Ball Soup

A clinical psychologist who has done research and counseling on the dilemmas faced by HIV negative gay men, Dr. Odets is also an avid cook. He's been making this soup (and freezing leftovers for later) since his aunt gave him a set of pots and pans and a cookbook back when he was in college in 1968.

Info: Serves 10-12; calories: 327; total fat: 11 g; saturated fat: 2 g; carbohydrates: 30 g; protein: 25 g; cholesterol: 67 mg.

1 whole chicken
10 cloves garlic (5 chopped, 5 whole)
5 shallots, finely minced
3 scallions, coarsely chopped
3 tablespoons olive oil
6 celery stalks (3 chopped, 3 whole)
1 whole onion, yellow or white
1/2 cup small white mushrooms
ground pepper to taste
1 12-ounce box Manischewitz Matzo Meal

Rinse the chicken and vegetables. Brown the chicken, whole, in a deep soup pot with 2 tablespoons olive oil, chopped garlic and shallots. Remove chicken from the pot. Then brown the mushrooms with 1 tablespoon olive oil, garlic and shallots. Put the whole chicken back in the pot (it will fall apart as it cooks). Add celery and cover with cold water. Stick remaining cloves of garlic

in the onion and add, whole, to the pot. Cover and bring to a gentle boil. Skim film from top. Cover and simmer on very low heat for 21/2 hours. Remove whole celery, add chopped celery, carrots, scallions and pepper. Make matzo balls according to the directions on the box, about the size of a marble (they will get larger in the soup). Continue to simmer for another 1/2 hour.

Option: To give the soup a kind of mysterious overtone, add very freshly ground nutmeg.

Dr. Mary Ann Chiasson’s Very Very Quick Chowder

Though Dr. Chiasson, New York City’s assistant commissioner of health, professes to being frequently seduced by takeout, she and her molecular biologist husband like to whip up this home-heated confection on lazy weekends.

Info: Serves 2; calories: 200; total fat: 10 g; saturated fat: 3 g; carbohydrates: 21 g; protein: 6 g; cholesterol: 15 mg.

1 can Progresso New England Clam Chowder (or other brand)
1 dash sherry
freshly ground pepper

Empty can’s contents in pot; bring to near boil over low heat and add the sherry. Remove and serve, adding pepper to taste.

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