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SPINACH AND LENTIL SOUP WITH CHEESE AND BASIL

Cooking Light – January/February 2012

Makes 4 Servings

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup chopped pancetta (about 1 ounce)
- 1¼ cups chopped onion
- ¾ cup chopped celery
- ¾ cup chopped carrot
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup dried brown lentils
- 3 cups fat-free, lower-sodium chicken broth
- 2 cups water
- 1 (6-ounce) package fresh baby spinach
- ½ cup chopped fresh basil
- ¼ cup (1 ounce) grated fresh Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

- Heat a Dutch oven over medium heat. Add oil to pan; swirl to coat. Add pancetta; cook 1 minute or until pancetta begins to brown, stirring occasionally. Add onion and next 4 ingredients (through bay leaf); cook 8 minutes or until vegetables are tender, stirring occasionally.
- Add lentils, broth, and 2 cups water; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 40 minutes or until lentils are tender and mixture is slightly thickened.
- Remove from heat. Discard bay leaf.
- Place 2 cups lentil mixture in a blender. Remove the center piece of blender lid (to allow steam to escape), and secure blender lid on blender. Place a clean towel over opening in blender (to avoid splatters), and blend until smooth. Return pureed lentil mixture to pan.
- Add baby spinach, chopped basil, Parmesan cheese, lemon juice and black pepper; stir until spinach wilts.
- Serve immediately.