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I felt it coming on that morning — a tickle in my throat, complete congestion of my sinus cavity, the beginnings of a raspy cough, watery eyes and a dry mouth.

And unlike so many of you out there who seem to relish their symptoms, I do not like to be sick. I don't have time for it, I cannot stand it and I will not succumb to it.

I fight colds the old-fashioned way — the *real* old-fashioned way, with echinacea, Oregon grape and grapefruit seed extracts. Maybe a little wild oregano on my feet. And when I need to serious battle at the cellular level, I employ an even more time-honored tradition: piping-hot Vietnamese soup.

Call it Indochine penicillin. So I headed over to Binh Minh, which is, in fact, not the name of a professional poker player but a fantastic Vietnamese restaurant in a city full of them. I secured a pot of jasmine tea and place an order for a dish called *mi hu tieu thap cam*, which is usually written with many accents and flourishes over the letters that I do not know how to replicate on my US keyboard configuration.

I sipped my tea and waited in the cheery dining room, accented with red-checked tablecloths, Christmas lights, large potted plants and a chandelier or two. A glass-brick façade allowed for natural light to seep in.

The soup came in a small cauldron brimming with seafood, chicken, greens and vegetables like baby corn, greens, Romaine lettuce, snow peas, green onions, two kinds of mushrooms, bamboo shoots and water chestnuts, along with plenty of thin egg noodles. Plated on the side were bean sprouts, fresh jalapeño slices, lemon and cilantro. I mixed them in and inhaled the vapors, which held essences of savory spice. And then I dove in, experiencing the lavors like picking out the instrumentation in a symphony.

As I ate, the soup began to work its magic, purging my sinus cavity and causing my mild fever to break with all-over body sweats. I ordered extra napkins, not because the dish was messy but because it caused me to weep and sneeze in the most salubrious of ways.

Also, it should be said, this was a tremendous amount of food. Even when a tad under the weather, I am a card-carrying member of the clean-plate club. And I was astonished to discover that I absolutely could not inish my meal — which, I remind

you, was just a bowl of soup that didn't even come with any bread. I picked out all of the seafood — shrimp, mussels, imitation crabmeat, calamari and scallops. Which leads me to a single complaint about the dish and other variations of it: The broth is just so damn hot that the calamari and scallops tend to become overcooked in the time it takes to eat it. But hey, even an overcooked scallop is pretty tasty, and it did not go unnoticed that Binh Minh uses real sea scallops — the big ones — and not the smaller bay scallops or the imitation ones made from pressed whitefish.

The menu, of course, has much to offer besides soups including an entire array of traditional Southeast Asian fare, daily lunch and dinner specials, imported beers and that awesome Vietnamese iced coffee that, when the weather is right, I could drink all morning.

But on this day, soup was just what the naturopathic doctor ordered, and I could feel it healing me even as I made my way back to my car. I don't know why it works — I just know it does.

wanna go?

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