

NUTRITION

# Listen to your gut

## The latest diet fad: Foods that promote intestinal health

By **Cheryl Truman**  
McClatchy Newspapers

**I**t's not all in your head. These days, it's all in your gut. Twenty years ago, oat bran was the food that was going to put us all into a state of high-fiber, clear-hearted bliss.

Now the food trend is lower in the fat. You want to be healthy in 2008? Ponder your intestines.

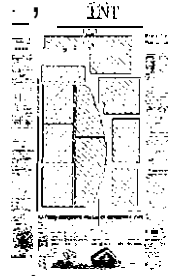
Dannon sells Activia yogurt, which promotes bathroom regularity. It also hawks mini-smoothies called DanActive, that claim to boost immunity. You didn't know? Much of your immunity lies in the foot after foot of epithelial cells lining your intestines — a kind of spongy exchange center where nutrients are absorbed and wastes are expelled

Kraft sells "probiotic" cheese and cottage cheese. Planters has introduced a "digestive health mix" that includes "prebiotic" high-fiber items including granola, almonds and dried cherries.

There's even a new book, "Health Begins in the Colon" (Ulysses Press, \$19.99) by Edward Group.

Group says part of our problem, not to put too fine a point on it, is transit time: how long it takes for what you ingest to do its body business and exit you. People in good health should have a bowel movement two or three times a day. Group says. An ideal transit time for food to get in, break down and be on its way? Ten to 18 hours.

Dannon has touted the health benefits of its yogurt as far back as



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the iconic 1970s commercials that promoted the long-lived yogurt-eating Russian Georgians. Now, Dannon has added Activia and DanActive as specialty products that promote intestinal fortitude from the dairy case.

Dannon's biotically charged yogurts are life-style products that produce a benefit — but only if you're taking them. "You have to consume these products regularly," spokesman Michael Neuwirth says. "It's not an on-off switch."

Whether a product is on or off, of course, depends on the consumer. And that's where food fads, as much fashion as science, start.

### Oat bran's fall from grace

Dr. James Anderson of the University of Kentucky saw the boom and bust of his favored grain 20 years ago.

At the height of the oat bran frenzy, a New York baker who couldn't get oat bran described it in terms that made it sound like flaked fibrous gold: You could charge anything you wanted for it, he said, and people would pay it.

Then, in January 1990, oat bran plummeted from favor. The New England Journal of Medicine said that it wasn't any more effective than wheat fiber. Both worked by displacing other items in the diet. An additional victim was the suggestion that oat bran caused diarrhea and bloating.

And that was the single moment, the dull thunk, that killed oat bran.

Oat bran pandemonium was less about eating varied and healthy and more about getting the big cool: of the moment. In 1988, that was an oat bran muffin. Now it's anything

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containing omega-3 oils or probiotics.

In , there were innumerable **superfoods** to **en** those about, **buy and abar on**, among them vitamin E, beta carotene, soy, green tea and "fat-free" formulations that, as the food-villain focus shifted, **morphed** into "low-carb" foodstuffs.

And why do consumers think they need to flit among foods? **Part** of the blame gets tossed into the vast blame pit known as journalism: A 1994 New **England Journal of Medicine** **article** by Marcia Angell and Jerome Kassirer argued that reporters and the public were complicit in seeking easy, definitive, permanent answers from scientists who don't have them.

Christine Gerbstadt, a registered dietician and doctor who works with the American **Dietetic Association**, knows **th** the consistent message put forward by her **organiza**tion — **eat a varied diet, exercise and maintain** a restrained lifestyle — doesn't resonate with consumers the way food fads do.

We want our prescription for health to be peppy, easy and available in a word — two at most.

Hence: "oat bran." "low fat." "low **carb**." And now, "digestive health."

What's vexing is that some of the food fads eventually are confirmed by additional

research: The University of Kentucky's Anderson says additional studies have proved that he was right **af**ter all: Oat bran is good for your heart. Being right might not bring back the oat bran-enhanced tortilla chip, but Anderson is gratified nonetheless.

### Colon confusion

Of course, marketing to your intestinal tract is hard: It's tough to **distinguish be**tween **prebiotic (more fiber)** and **probiotic (more bacteria)**. And there's the gross-out factor in **y** detailed discussion of **olo** cleanliness

**Beth Loisel**le, who offers nutritional counseling at Lexington, Ky.'s Good Foods Market and is the author of "The Healing Power of Whole Foods" (HealthWays Nutrition), says that natural health products have a **part** in a balanced diet but **that** consumers have to be **y** of putting all parts of diet and supplementation in the context of a thoughtful, varied eating plan.

"All of these things are important, but **when** people hear a little bit **and just do one** thing and don't look at their overall diet, **that's** not going to help them," she says.

She urges clients to eat more whole grains and vegetables, cut back on sugar and make sure they eat some protein with each meal.

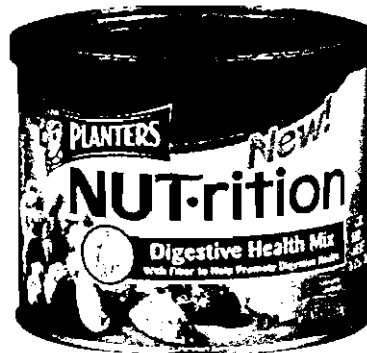
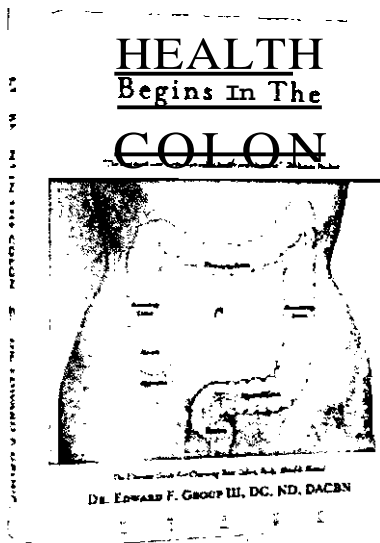




Dannon's Activia yogurt claims to help regulate your digestive system by helping reducing long intestinal tract time.



DanActive is a probiotic drink that claims to help strengthen your body's immune system by balancing your intestinal bacteria.



Planter's Nutrition Digestive Health Mix is one of the new products in grocery stores that follows the 'digestive health' food trend.

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