



New food claims: Listen to your gut

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It'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.

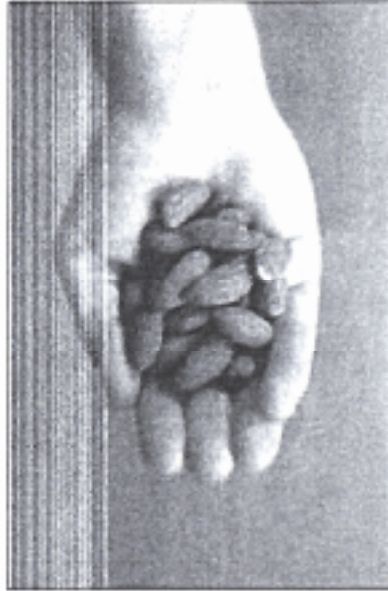
Now, the food trend is lower in the body. You want to be healthy in 2008? Ponder your intestines.

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 said of his epiphanic moment: "I never hear anything in the medical community about the intestinal tract."

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,



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Almonds, in moderate amounts, are considered a heart-healthy food.

break down and be on its way? Ten to 18 hours.

To get an idea of how the intestines work, Group says, consider mixing up everything you eat and drink in a day and smearing it on your skin: After a few hours, it's going to get pretty vile.

That's the other part of the intestinal-health equation: **urg-**ing the toxins in our food to move on out. Or, with Group's dietary recommendations, never eating them in the first place. He doesn't like laxatives — which he says are drugs — or even psyllium, which he says doesn't repair or cleanse the colon but instead scrapes the intestinal walls a little. He prefers an oxygen-based colon cleanse followed by a diet low in junk and high in fruit.

Then there's Dannon's method of colon overhaul.

Dannon has touted the



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A daily **dose** of blueberries has been touted as a **superfood**.



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Some "probiotic" cheeses, as well as cottage cheese, are on the market now.

health benefits of its yogurt as far back as the iconic 1970s commercials that promoted the long-lived yogurt-eating Russian Georgians Noh: Dannon has added Activia and **DanActive** as specialty products that promote intestinal fortitude from the dairy case.

Where does Activia sell best? Dannon spokesman Michael Neuwirth isn't saying, although he acknowledges that an excretion-encouraging yogurt tends to sell better in regions of the country where poor eating





habits predominate.

Dannon's biotically charged yogurts are lifestyle products that produce a benefit — but only if you continue taking them. "You have to consume these products regularly," Neuwirth said. "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.

One day, oat bran **was** being added to seemingly every product on the grocery shelf because of its **heart-**healthy properties. Anderson was dubbed Dr. Oat Bran for his role in popularizing oat bran.

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 whammy was the suggestion that oat bran caused diarrhea and bloating.

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

