

Gummy bears - they do a body good

Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston Tribune

They make gummy bears now that are fortified with electrolytes and other stuff runners, walkers and other such types need when participating in an endurance event.

I found this out recently when I was checking out the website for the Portland, Ore., marathon, where I will be in a month from now, trying - once again - to cross the finish line with a smile on my face.

Most of the runs I've been involved in serve some kind of fortified snack along the way to help runners and walkers replace the water, salt and other minerals they sweat out. Usually it's fruit slices or nutritional gel that tastes like cupcake frosting and makes me gag. I have to force it down, but it's necessary to keep from bonking a few miles from the finish line.

I actually am quite excited to have gummy bears waiting for me at Portland. I've always liked those little dudes, and they're not nearly as repulsive to swallow as the slimy gel I'm used to.

But who would ever have thought gummy bears would be a health food?

I guess any kind of food can be made healthier if it's fortified enough. I'm thinking of breakfast cereal. When I was a kid we had corn flakes and puffed rice, and the nutritional value in that was probably only a centimeter higher than the hay we fed horses.

Then somebody had the idea to muscle up simple flakes, and we started getting breakfast cereal that had so many minerals and vitamins in it that one bowlful in the morning could power a kid for a week. The box of those cereals tastes better than the cereal itself, but if you wanted a single food product that could provide every nutrient your body needs, fortified cereal is the way to go.

Old folks, too, who sometimes are not hearty eaters can get most everything they need in little cans of milk shakes. Those things are handy when a body just isn't feeling up to eating much or even in a pinch when you don't have time to rustle up a decent meal. But in my mind it hardly replaces a big plate of spaghetti and meatballs.

The value of food these days isn't strictly in its taste or its healthful content. Good food is also measured in how easy it is to open the package and whether or not you can eat it in the car.

How else can you explain the popularity of corn dogs and jerky?

Frankly, I like to take my nutrition in layers. I don't expect any one thing to do everything for me: oatmeal can be just oatmeal and a banana is fine being itself.

But there are times when packing a can of sardines or a peanut butter sandwich just doesn't make sense. And that's when a person can feel grateful for a handful of gummy bears that can power you across the finish line.

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