



Packaged Food and Health Concerns

For Prelims: [Indian Council of Medical Research](#), [National Institute of Nutrition](#), [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#), [Hypertension](#), [Type 2 diabetes](#)

For Mains: Public health and safety, India's Food Processing Industry, Concerns Regarding Packaged Foods, India's Efforts to Promote Healthy Eating

Source: TH

Why in News?

The [Indian Council of Medical Research \(ICMR\)](#) and the **National Institute of Nutrition (NIN)** have highlighted the importance of carefully reading [food labels](#) to avoid health risks.

- Their recent report provides guidelines for healthy eating habits and warns against **deceptive claims on packaged foods**.

What are the Key Recommendations for a Healthier Lifestyle?

- **Moderation in Consumption:** The guidelines emphasise the need to use oil and fats in moderation and reduce the intake of salt and sugar.
 - They aim to lower the risk of [coronary heart disease](#), [hypertension](#), and **up to 80% of type 2 diabetes cases can be prevented through a healthy lifestyle**.
- **Exercise and Physical Activity:** Guidelines emphasise regular physical activity alongside a balanced diet to prevent diseases like [obesity](#).
 - Reduced physical activity and **increased** consumption of highly processed **foods exacerbate micronutrient deficiencies and overweight issues**.
- **Dietary Diversity and Nutrient Intake:** The guidelines recommend **sourcing [macronutrients and micronutrients](#)** from a minimum of eight food groups to have a balanced diet.
 - The aim is to provide all nutritional requirements and prevent micronutrient deficiencies in all age groups.
- **Limiting Ultra-Processed Foods:** The guidelines emphasise the importance of limiting the consumption of [ultra-processed or processed foods](#) in the diet.
 - These instant food options are **high in sugar, salt, and fat**, which can be harmful to health, contribute to micronutrient deficiencies and exacerbate overweight issues.
- **Informed Food Choices:** The guidelines urge consumers to make a habit of checking food labels to enable them to make healthy food choices.
 - This habit can help prevent obesity by enabling consumers to avoid foods high in sugars, fats, and salts.
- **Avoid Protein Supplements:** The guidelines discourage the use of protein supplements to enhance muscle mass.
 - They note that **dietary protein supplementation provides only a small increase in muscle strength and size**, and the consumption of large amounts of high-protein supplements can lead to **issues like bone mineral loss and kidney damage**.

How can the Guidelines Benefit Populations?

- **Pregnant Women and New Mothers:** Access to additional nutritious food supports overall health for mother and baby, reducing the risk of complications.
- **Infants and Young Children:** Exclusive breastfeeding for six months supports optimal physical and [cognitive development](#), followed by introduction of complementary foods.
- **Children and Adolescents:** Balanced diets support learning, growth, and physical activity for optimal development.
- **Elderly People:** Prioritising nutrient-rich foods addresses specific needs like bone health and immune function, improving quality of life.

How can Packaged Foods be Misleading?

- **Attention-Grabbing Labels:** Packaged foods often use labels designed to catch the consumer's eye and suggest health benefits, which can be misleading.
- **'Natural' Claims:** Processed food, labelled as 'natural', may still contain preservatives and added colours.
 - The term is often loosely used to highlight one or two natural ingredients, leading to consumer confusion. Terms like "natural," "organic," and "sugar-free" can be ambiguous and misinterpreted by consumers, potentially leading to unhealthy choices.
 - Truly organic food should be free of preservatives, flavours, colors, pesticides, and chemical fertilisers. Only products meeting these **criteria should use the 'Jaivik Bharat' logo approved by the [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#)**.
 - **Making deceptive claims or advertisements** are punishable offences under **Section-53 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
- **Packaged Juice Labels:** According to FSSAI regulations, juices with as little as 10% natural fruit can be labelled as made with real pulp or juice, which can **mislead consumers regarding the actual content**.
- **Fruit Ripening: Calcium carbide use for fruit ripening** can be misleading on packaged foods because fruits ripened this way have health risks associated with it.
 - Calcium carbide releases **acetylene gas**, which contains harmful traces of **arsenic and phosphorus**, substances known as "Masala".
 - These can cause a **range of health issues** such as dizziness, frequent thirst, irritation, weakness, difficulty in swallowing, vomiting, and skin ulcers. Additionally, the **acetylene gas itself is hazardous to those handling it**.
 - Due to these dangers, the use of calcium carbide for ripening fruits has been banned under the **Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011**.
 - FSSAI has instead permitted the use of **"ethylene gas" as a safer alternative for fruit ripening in India**, as it is a naturally occurring hormone that regulates the ripening process.
- **Contamination of Chemical:** Nepal's recent ban on **certain spice mixes from Indian brands** along with Singapore and Hong Kong raises serious concerns about misleading packaging and potential health risks.
 - These products are suspected to be **contaminated with ethylene oxide or EtO contamination, a chemical used for fumigation**.
- **Whole Grain Misrepresentation:** Products may advertise whole grains but contain only a small percentage, with the rest being refined grains.

What is the Status of India's Food Processing Industry?

- **Strong Growth Potential:**
 - The Food processing industry is a **sunrise sector** in India, offering immense investment opportunities.
 - The government actively promotes the sector through the **Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI)**.
- **Government Initiatives:**
 - [Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana \(PMKSY\)](#)

- [Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme \(PMFME\)](#)
- [PLI Scheme for Food Processing Industry](#)
- **Investment-Friendly Environment:**
 - 100% **FDI** allowed under automatic route for most food processing sectors.
 - 100% FDI allowed through government approval route for e-commerce of domestically produced food products.
- **Positive Performance Indicators:**
 - Food processing exports surged 13% to USD 19.69 Bn in FY 2022-23.
 - Total FDI inflow into food processing reached USD 12.46 Bn by Dec 2023.
 - The Indian **Food Processing market is projected to reach a massive USD 535 Bn by 2025**, growing at a 15.2% compound annual growth rate (CAGR).

What are India's Efforts to Promote Healthy Eating?

- [PM Poshan SHAKti Nirman \(PM-POSHAN\)](#)
- [Poshan Abhiyaan \(National Nutrition Mission\)](#)
- [Integrated Child Development Services \(ICDS\) Scheme](#)
- [Eat Right Movement](#)
- [Eat Right Mela](#)
- [Eat Right Awards](#)

Way Forward

- **Standardisation of Terminology:** Implement **clear definitions and standardised use of terms** like "natural," "organic," and "sugar-free" to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation by consumers.
 - Mandate food labels to clearly **disclose all processing methods** used, including information about potential contaminants.
- **Nutritional Literacy:** Incorporating nutritional literacy into school curricula to instil the habit of reading food labels and making informed food choices from a young age.
- **Taxation and Subsidies:** Implementing taxation on ultra-processed foods and **providing subsidies for whole foods** to make healthier options more affordable.
- **Mobile Applications:** Developing mobile applications that can **scan product barcodes and provide a detailed analysis of nutritional content** and health ratings.
- **Meal Planning Tools:** Develop and disseminate evidence-based dietary guidelines tailored to the Indian population. Provide accessible meal planning tools and resources to promote healthy, balanced diets.
- **Health Policies:** The guidelines support the goals of the **National Nutrition Policy** and complement government efforts to promote holistic nutrition and health.
 - Supporting local farmers' markets and **promoting kitchen gardens** can also increase access to fresh produce.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the implications of deceptive practices in packaged foods, including misleading labels, on public health outcomes and assess the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at promoting balanced nutrition.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With reference to pre-packaged items in India, is it mandatory to the manufacturer to put which of the following information on the main label, as per the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011? (2016)

1. List of ingredients including additives
2. Nutrition information
3. Recommendations, if any, made by the medical profession about the possibility of any allergic reactions
4. Vegetarian/non-vegetarian

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
(b) 2, 3 and 4
(c) 1, 2 and 4
(d) 1 and 4 only

Ans: (c)

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