

PACKAGED FOODS 'BREACH' SALT LIMITS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

Several packaged snacks and fast foods breach safe limits for salt and fat content, an analysis conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) says.

The agency tested salt, fat, trans-fat and carbohydrates in 33 popular “junk foods”: 14 samples of chips, salted snacks, instant noodles and instant soup, and 19 samples of burgers, fries, fried chicken, pizzas, sandwiches and wraps. The samples were collected from grocery and fast food outlets in Delhi. The CSE relied on the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) — the daily ceiling for salt, fat, carbohydrates and trans-fat. The RDA is based on scientific consensus and has been agreed upon by the World Health Organisation and the National Institute of Nutrition in India. It says that ideally, no more than 5 g of salt, 60 g of fat, 300 g of carbohydrate and 2.2 g of trans-fat should be consumed by an adult every day. The RDA from breakfast, lunch and dinner should be no more than 25% each, and from snacks, no more than 10%.

The CSE found that per 100 g, one packet of packaged nuts, soup or noodles had salt and fat well over the limit. For instance, Haldiram Aloo Bhujia, with a serve size of 231 g, had the equivalent of 7 gm of salt and 99 gm of total (saturated and unsaturated) fat. A serving of Nestle's Maggi Masala (70 g) exhausted 50% of composite RDA for a snack, and a serving of Haldiram's nut cracker exhausted 35% of the salt RDA and 26% of the fat RDA.

The proposed Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations say companies must declare calories (energy), saturated fat, trans-fat, added sugar and sodium per serve. Labels must show the per serve share of the RDA on the pack. Though discussed since 2015 in many drafts — the latest in July — the rules have yet to become law.

The CSE took the values prescribed in the drafts for their calculations and concluded that all of the popular snacks and fast foods ought to be displaying a 'Red Octagon', a warning symbol employed in packaged foods in Chile and Peru. The Red Octagon, which should be printed on the front of the pack, has a number and the name of the food component within that indicates how widely off the RDA a particular ingredient is.

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