

# CONSUMER EDUCATION



[Quarterly publication of Consumer Educators Network (CENET) of GREAT]

No.2/2007

April - June 2007

## WHO IS A CONSUMER

**AFTER** having known what is consumer education and why we need it, let us understand who a consumer is. The word '**consumer**' in its broadest sense includes all living beings which consume one thing or the other. We human being consumes food, water and air. Similarly animals eat food and drink water. So, both are consumers. But unlike animals, we buy our food, clothing etc., from the market. So we need to know how to distinguish who a consumer is.

Let us assume that your father brings a packet of sweets for you to eat. But he doesn't eat. Here your father is only a **BUYER** and not a consumer. You eat the sweet. So you are a **CONSUMER**, but not a buyer. A buyer may not be a consumer and a consumer need not be a buyer. If your father also eats the sweets then he will be both buyer and a consumer.

Right from the time you get up from your bed in the morning up to the time you go to bed in the night you consume many things and use many services. For example everyday you use toothpaste, toothbrush, water, bath soap, towel, uniform, breakfast, shoes, school bag, books, pencils, toys, sports equipments like ball, bat, wickets etc. Whether you purchase all these things or not, you are a consumer because

you consume them. You will find that all the things listed are available in the market for a price. These are called **GOODS**.

But there are certain other items without which you cannot live comfortably. For example if



This is the second part of the four part article on "A Window to Consumer Education"

You want to go to school either you need a van or a bus. In your school you need a teacher to teach. Assume that when you are playing you get hurt. You need a doctor to give you medical treatment. Everyday you have to wear uniform to go to school. Who stitches your clothes..? you need a tailor. If you want to have a haircut you need a barber. So the work done by the driver of your van, the teacher, the doctor, the tailor and the barber are called **SERVICES**.

So you will agree that if we want to live happily we need to purchase goods and hire

services. But when once you are in the market place you will find that choosing between different goods and services becomes a difficult job. For example assume that you want a tooth paste or a tooth brush. Have you ever counted how many brands of toothpaste and brush are available..? You find on TV a number of companies advertising that their toothpaste is the best. But which one to buy?

It is not an easy job to make right choice and right purchases. However if you cultivate some techniques you will not only get the best for your money but also become an ideal consumer. In the beginning you understood who a consumer is. Now you will be surprised to note that the qualities of a good consumer is available in the word **CONSUMER** itself.

Firstly, an ideal consumer is one who is conscious and vigilant of his/her rights. Every consumer has rights and responsibilities. You will learn about this later. As consumers you should know these rights and responsibilities.

Second, an ideal consumer does not buy goods without observation. He or she will keenly observe the market and then decide to buy. Third, a good consumer will never be carried away by brands, but always goes for quality. You should know that all popular brands may not be good in quality.

Continued >>>>>2

## Types of consumers

should know that all popular brands may not be good in quality.

Fourth, an intelligent consumer will not spend all the money, but tries to save as much as possible. Not only money, a good consumer should conserve other resources as well. Fifth, a good consumer should be well informed and upgrade his/her purchasing skill. Sixth, as a consumer, you should be moderate and wise in spending. Extremes should be avoided.

Seventh, an ideal consumer will always examine and read the labels carefully. Labels on the packet is a source of information which can be used by you to decide whether to buy or reject a product, finally if you are an ideal consumer you should never hesitate to ask for compensation in case the product you have purchased is not in order.

So an ideal consumer is one who is:

Conscious and vigilant of his/her rights  
 Observes keenly before making a decision  
 Never goes for brands but prefers quality  
 Saves energy and other resources for a rainy day  
 Upgrades his/her purchasing skill  
 Moderate and wise in spending  
 Examines and reads labels  
 Reasonable but firm in seeking compensation

You have understood who an ideal consumer is. Now we shall see in how many ways consumer can be grouped and to which group you belong.

The first group consists of consumers who never bother about money and buy whatever they see. Thrift and economy is not in their character. Always they want to have luxury items. Such consumers are called **SPENDTHRIFT**.

The second type of consumers are just opposite to the first. They do not want to spend money even for buying food articles. They always go for cheap variety and thereby suffer from ill health. They are called **CLOSE-FISTED CONSUMERS**.

There are some consumers who have the habit of wasting everything. For example they do not switch off the lights or close the taps. They throw away good food. Consumers of this group are called **WASTEFUL CONSUMERS**.

You are familiar with bargain and discount sales. Everywhere you find banners with slogans like 50 per cent discount, take one and buy one free etc. There are some consumers who are in the habit of buying in these shops regularly. They are called **BARGAIN ADDICT CONSUMERS**.

Some consumers are in the habit of buying in large quantities based on rumors. If somebody says that from tomorrow petrol or sugar will not be available, they will buy in large quantities and hoard them. These consumers are called **PANIC BUYERS**.

Whenever you see an attractive advertisement or special offers you are tempted to buy that product. You will not think before spending on such product. If you have this habit, you are called **IMPULSIVE BUYER**.

But there is one group of consumers who purchase only if they are able to pay. They make a list of what to buy, when to buy, where to buy and how much to buy. They know what they need and what they want. They are called **INTELLIGENT CONSUMERS**.

**Now check up to which group you belong.**

## Project on Advertisements

The effectiveness of consumer clubs largely depends on identifying projects that may be taken up by members of the consumer clubs. Young consumers should be taught how to conduct field studies, surveys, interviewing etc. This will make them aware of the various problems of consumers. In this background CREAT has identified some projects and will be published periodically in this newsletter. The first project on Advertisements is given below.

### Introduction:

Ever since the electronic media made its appearance, the trade has found a convenient mode for advertising their products. Particularly with the introduction of private channels, the multinational companies have used the electronic media to their advantage, with scant regard to the interests of the consumers.

The advertisements that appear on the TV through various channels have significantly changed the

life style of the consumers. Apart from encouraging the consumerist attitude, they have targeted children to sell their products. There are also advertisements which have made exaggerated claims in terms of health and nutrition.

There has been a growing concern around the world about the effects of advertisement, particularly on children. Consumer associations have expressed their unhappiness about advertisement targeting children and creating false notions in them.

### **Objectives:**

- To study the advertisement appearing on the visual media and its effect on children.
- To verify the claims made in the advertisements.
- To study the regulatory mechanism available to stop false advertisements.

### **Methods of studying:**

1. Select a group of 15 students in the age group of 10 to 15 years.
2. Allot them particular channels available on TV.
3. Ask them to watch the particular channel for one hour continuously for three days at different times.
4. While watching they should note down the following:
  - a. Name of the product advertised.
  - b. Name of the company.
  - c. Nature of the product, for example.  
(a)Cosmetic (b) Soft drinks  
(c) Chocolates (d) Bubble gum (e) Toys etc.,
  - d. The duration of the advertisement (in Mts.).

- e. How many times it is repeated in one hour.
  - f. What does the advertisement promises.
  - g. Whether cost of the product announced.
  - h. Whether any precautions are given.
  - i. Who appears in the advertisements i.e. film star, cricketer, etc.
5. After noting the above data, students should be asked to answer the following Questions:
- a. Do you believe in these advertisements?
  - b. Do you want to purchase the products at any cost?
  - c. Do you pressurize your parents to purchase a product based on the advertisement shown on TV?
  - d. In case what is said in the advertisement on the TV is not true what will you do..? Return the product..? Throw it away..? Use it and decide not to buy for the next time..? Complaint to the manufacturer..?
  - e. Do you compare the contents of the product with what you saw/heard on TV.

The teachers in charge and should analyse the data collected and prepare a study report.

Students who feel that advertisements are untrue, can be asked to draw posters, cartoons etc. about untrue advertisement (without indicating the name of the company, or product) Students can be asked to write letters to manufacturers seeking clarification about the statements in the advertisements.

A complaint to the Advertisements Standards Council of India may be made about untrue/unfair advertisements.

## **Asian children succumb to unregulated television advertising**

According to a report released by the Consumers International's Asia Pacific Regional Office children in Asia are subject to high and unregulated levels of TV advertising, especially for food products. In India, 40% to 50% of television advertisements during children's programs are for food. In an hour, 15 minutes are devoted to advertisements in India.

## **Rules for Safe Food**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is an international body devoted to health and well being of the people. Food being a component of health, the WHO lays emphasis on safety of food. The Rules for Safe Food, published by WHO is reproduced below:

**Choose foods carefully:** Many foods, such as fruits and vegetables, are best in their natural state, but due to liberal use of pesticides and insecticides on such food, it is prudent to thoroughly wash the food. When buying processed food, look for the date of manufacture,

ingredients and description of the food, before deciding to buy it. Please remember that food processing was invented not just to improve safety, but to prolong shelf-life as well

**Cook food thoroughly:** Many raw foods, most notably poultry, meats and non-pasteurized milk, are very often contaminated with disease-causing pathogens. Thorough cooking will kill the pathogens, but remember that the temperature of all parts of the food must reach to least 70 degree C. Frozen food including meat, fish and poultry must be thoroughly thawed before cooking. Avoid

**Eat cooked food immediately:** When cooked foods cool to room temperature, (between 10 and 60 degree C) microbes begin to proliferate. The longer the wait the greater the risk. To be on the safe side, eat cooked foods just as soon as they come off the heat

**Store cooked foods carefully:** If you must prepare food in advance or want to keep leftover, be sure to store them under either hot (near or above 60 degree C) or cool (near or below 10 degree C) conditions and in tightly closed containers. This rule is of vital importance if you plan to store foods for more than four or five hours. Food for infants should preferably not be stored at all. A common error, responsible for countless cases of food borne diseases, is putting too large a quantity of warm food in the refrigerator. In an overburdened refrigerator, cooked foods cannot cool to the core as quickly as they must. When the centre of food remains warm (above 10 degree C) too long, microbes thrive, quickly proliferating to disease producing levels.

**Reheat cooked food thoroughly:** This is your best protection against microbes that may have developed during storage (proper storage slows down microbial growth but does not kill the organisms) Once again thorough reheating means that all parts of the food must reach at least 70 degree C

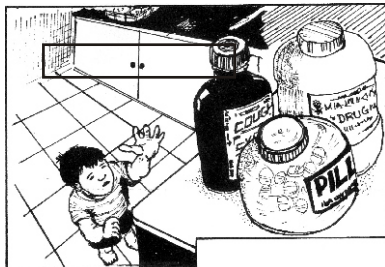
**Avoid contact between raw foods and cooked foods:** Safely cooked food can become contaminated through even the slightest contact with raw food. This cross-contamination can be direct, and it can also be subtle. So please rinse your knives and spoons before reusing them in another food preparation

**Wash hands repeatedly**

**Use good water:** Water is just as important for food preparation as for drinking. If you have any doubts about the water supply boil the water before adding it to food

### **Do's and Dont's about drugs**

Drugs are often used to cure illnesses and ward off unpleasant symptoms. But the same drugs can become dangerous poisons if abused. In almost every home some form of drugs pills, medicated syrups and mixtures medicated creams lotions and many other types are found.



The success of using these substances for treatment depends on a variety of factors apart from the drug itself.

#### **Remember to.....**

- Tell your doctor about drug allergies and sensitivities
- Mention the drug you have already been taking
- Follow the doctor's instructions regularly
- Report if any new symptoms develop during the therapy
- Take correct doses
- See that bottles have been labeled correctly
- Take your prescription along while traveling
- Preserve your medication record
- Keep medicines away from the reach of children

### **Don't**

- Be your own doctor
- Take medical advice from friends and relatives



- Overdose for quick relief
- Cut short the duration of therapy once the symptoms disappear, unless otherwise specified
- Combine drugs with home medicines
- Use expired drugs
- Try to guess your disease and select your own medicine
- Share your prescription with someone else
- Ask your physician for a particular medicine

**And finally Beware of quacks**



Published by :

**CONSUMER RIGHTS EDUCATION & AWARENESS TRUST (CREAT)**

No.239,5th 'C' Main Remco Layout, Hampinagar, Bengaluru-560104

Tel : 91-80-23357280, E.mail : creatorg@sify.com , Website : www.creatindia.org