

# CONSUMER EDUCATION

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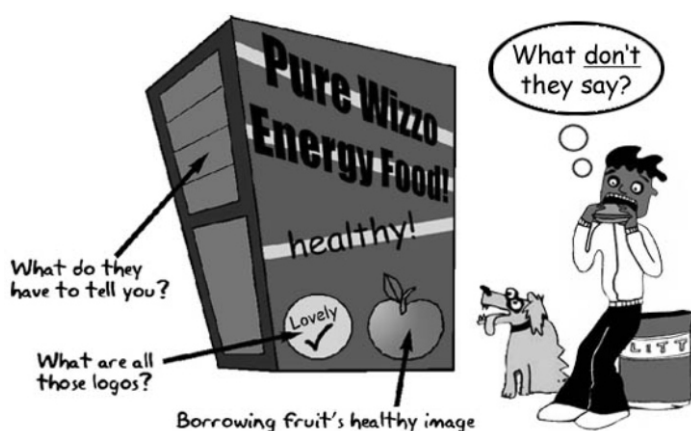


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## Food Labeling

What a consumer eats decides his health and well being. Hence a consumer who need to be healthy has to know what he is eating, what the food contains and how it is prepared. Of course the price of the product and details of the manufacturer are equally important. Hence governments all over the world have made it mandatory



to provide information to the consumers about the product sold. More so in case of food products. Various laws have been enacted which prescribe what information a consumer is to be provided.

With the introduction of fast foods, called convenience foods, the dietary patterns of young children is undergoing a sea change. Further food trade is going global. Gone are the days when the consumers were using products manufactured locally. Today food is manufactured thousands of miles away, it is transported and before it reaches the consumer there is long chain of traders and suppliers. Hence it is difficult for consumer to know more about the food they eat. One way of providing consumers with sufficient information about food is to label the food.

### **How does reading the food labels help the consumers?**

Reading the label helps the consumer:

To choose wisely and get value for money

To check ingredients and nutritional information

To avoid potentially dangerous food (i.e, beyond its 'date')

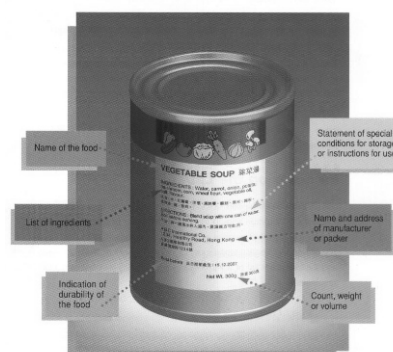
To give a clear understanding of what is meant by 'additives'

### **What should a label contain?**

The label should indicate the following:

- ❖ Batch Number
- ❖ Duly Registered trade/brand name
- ❖ Duly Registered business name
- ❖ List of ingredients used
- ❖ Net quantity of contents, in terms of Weight, measure or numerical count and size
- ❖ Standards of quality or safety
- ❖ The means of taking care of the product
- ❖ Manufacturer's name/brand name/trade name
- ❖ Address of the manufacturer
- ❖ Instructions for use and storage methods
- ❖ Standardised symbols i.e., Vegetarian (green dot) & Non-Vegetarian (Brown dot)
- ❖ Date of Manufacture, Date of packing and Date of Expiry

### **READ THE FOOD LABELS**



- ❖ Certification of standard such as Agmark, FPO, ISI
- ❖ Imported food products must contain the name and address of the Indian Importer
- ❖ Appropriate warnings i.e., Flammability, toxicity, corrosiveness etc.
- ❖ The conditions under which the food should be stored (keep refrigerated, keep frozen etc.)
- ❖ Retail sale price of the package

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### What is Food Labeling?

Food labels provide consumers with information about various important aspects like geographical origin, nutritional, value, preservatives or chemicals, expiry date, processes involved in production, storage and use. Pre-packed foods require the most extensive information and the clear marking of a 'shelf life' is the most useful information available to the buyer.

### Standards and Symbols

It is impossible to judge the quality of some goods just by looking at them. Shoppers can get help when buying by looking for special symbols which are allowed only on goods of an approved standard. A manufacturer can display these symbols or marks on a product only if it is up to certain standards set by the appropriate authority. Some of the important symbols in relation to food are, ISI, Agmark and FPO

**ISI Mark:** A certification marks scheme is operated by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) (earlier known as Indian Standard Institutions ISI) under the provisions of the BIS Act, 1986. Any product which has the ISI mark is supposed to be of minimum standard and safe to the consumers. The ISI mark is both mandatory and voluntary. Some of the products like cement, electrical appliances, LPG cylinder etc. have to necessarily be sold with ISI mark. There are products for which ISI mark is not compulsory.



**Agmark:** The Agmark is provided under the Agricultural products (Grading and Marking) Act, 1937. This Act aims to provide information and quality assurance of agricultural products to consumers as well as traders. Products like rice, pulses, edible oil etc are tested and graded. If found to be of a specific standard, the manufacturer is allowed to use the Agmark logo. As for consumers, Agmark is an assurance about quality of the product.



**FPO Mark:** The FPO mark has been made mandatory for fruit products like pickles, squashes, Jams etc.

All the above marks are formulated by the Government under a particular law. Hence any violation of the law is punishable with fine and penal action.

### Date Marks

Certain foods like breads, fish, chilled meat, milk products and other foods which have a shelf life of less than 40 days are required by law to carry a date marks. They are:

**Best Before** This is the date until which the food should still retain the qualities the manufacturer claims it will have, if it has been kept under the conditions specified on the label.

**Packed on** this is the date on which the food was placed in the package in which it will be sold to the consumer.

**Use By** this is the date after which the food, provided it has been stored under the correct conditions, may not retain the qualities the consumer would normally expect.

### Specific problems of children as consumers

Consumer education is a complex subject and needs to be tailored according to the problems children face. Consumer education is not teaching students about the laws, rules and regulations that are intended to protect consumer rights. That can come later. What is more important is to understand the needs of children as consumers. The Consumers International (formerly International Organization of Consumers Unions) has identified seven specific problems of children as consumers. The objective of consumer education is to analyse these problems and find solutions.



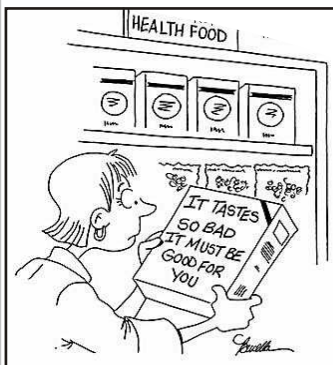
- How can children achieve their rights as consumers?
- How can we attempt to remove the gulf that exists between the haves and the have-nots, and eliminate for our children the bitterness of envy and jealousy?
- How can we best equip children to deal with the rapidity of technological and social change, to learn how to solve their problems and those of others in short, how to survive?
- How can we teach children to see the acquisition of material wealth and possessions in perspective as an aid to living but not as an end in itself which destroys spiritual values?
- How can they learn to defend themselves in an unequal contest against manipulation and exploitation by manufacturers, retailers and advertisers who use their powers of persuasion to exert an irrational influence?
- How can we achieve for them a safer and healthier environment at home, at school, at play, in public places?
- How can parents be tactfully and sensitively educated so that the best interests of children are taken into account?

(Source: *The Child as Consumer*)

### **What you need to do?**

Read the labels carefully before purchasing. Check "Best Before" date specifically Compare the product inside the box with that mentioned on the label

### **Exercise on Food Labeling :**



Food labeling can be a good topic for consumer clubs. The procedure for conducting this exercise is explained below:

#### **Step 1**

Ask the students to collect cartons and boxes of products of daily use like jam, ketchup, toothpaste, juice, fruit drinks, medi-

cines and other general products.

Divide the students into small groups and hand over the cartons, boxes etc to the group.

Ask the students to study the information printed on the boxes, cartons and make a list in a separate paper.

#### **Step-2**

Give the students handouts containing the legal requirements of labeling as specified in the Standards of Packaged Commodities Rules, Prevention of Food Adulteration Act and Drugs and Cosmetics Act

Ask the students to find out whether the particular carton or box meets the requirements of the relevant law

Ask the students to prepare a note describing how the information provided on the label is different or insufficient when compared to the legal requirements

#### **Step-3**

Ask the students to identify the Government Authorities who are in charge of implementing the above Rules and Regulations. For example the Standards of Packaged Commodities Rules is under the Department of Legal Metrology or the Controller of Weights and Measures. The Prevention of Food Adulteration Act is being monitored by the Chief Health Officer of the City Corporation and the Drugs Controller is in charge of Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

Ask the students to write a letter to the concerned manufacturer about the defects noticed in the label. In case more information is given ask the student to send a letter of appreciation to the manufacturer

Ask the students to prepare a letter to the concerned authorities and request them to take suitable action for violating the law

Assist the students in preparing a press release about the findings and send it to all the newspapers under the supervision of the teacher in charge of Consumer Club

### **Brand Names**

It is important to realize that the best promoted brands are not always the best quality or best buy and that other products are not necessarily inferior just because they are less well known. Quite often, if a consumer is satisfied with a particular brand, he continues to buy that product only. However, it is wise to consider the new brands that come up in the market and try to evaluate the usual brand from time to time.

### **Contents**

Labels should also provide precise information about what the product is made of. This is very important because some people may be allergic to some additives, or for religious, cultural or dietary reasons may wish to avoid eating certain foods.

If the label is not precise, special knowledge is required to interpret the information accurately. For example, "Fruit Juice" is made from real fruit juice with no water added, whereas "Fruit Drink" is made from fruit juice with 80% water added to it.

### **Know your rights when shopping**

Whatever you decide to buy, and wherever you buy it from, you should be aware of your legal rights if you are unhappy with the goods.

Don't be fooled into thinking you have fewer rights if you buy discounted goods in the shops. You have as many rights when you find a bargain as when you pay the full price.

You are entitled to complaint about any good you buy that are damaged, faulty, unsafe, or not described accurately. If you act quickly, you are entitled to demand a refund

If you see notices displayed stating that 'no refunds will be given' or 'goods once sold can not be returned' just ignore them.

### **Ban on Junk food, Cola in Schools likely**

A blanket ban on junk food and colas in school and university canteens all over the country and mandatory yoga classes in schools that's the Union Health Ministry's prescription to fight rising obesity among India's youth. The Health Minister, Mr.A.Ramadoss, has written to state health ministers to plan and implement the ban on junk food



seen as one of the main causes of the rise in heart disease, diabetes and cancer among middle class. Meanwhile, the sale and consumption of the cold drinks Pepsi and Coke have been prohibited in all the secondary and higher secondary schools of Gujrat.

(Source: Insight, Vol.27-1)

## Teach young consumers how to save & spend

Though there are no reliable studies about the spending pattern of young consumers, it can safely be said that students spend considerable amount of money on various items. Depending upon the economic level of the parents, students spend on food, clothing, stationery articles, footwear, going to films etc. These days even high school students spend lots of money on mobile phones. Though spending money in itself is not wrong, students should not be blind to the dangers of overspending. The power of advertisements is so strong that students lose their power to analyse and fall a prey to impulsive buying. Just because parents can afford money, it does

not mean that the students should spend. One of the objectives of consumer education is to teach students how to deal with money.

The world of consumption is enormously



complex, so that are the most important things you can teach your children about saving and spending? The following are particularly significant.

### The importance of saving

You should communicate to them the importance of saving a portion of income for future expenditures a vehicle, a trip, education or an emergency. You should also inform them of the dangers of spending more than their income

Consider requiring your children to save a percentage of their allowance, but explain that these savings can be used for some future expenditure, such as a college tuition, examination fee etc.

### When you are in a Super Market

If super markets attract you and you like to spend time there, we just warn you of the trap: don't be lured into buying more than you ever wanted, needed, thought, planned or dreamt of. The 10 tips here would prove an eye-opener to you and an ethical warning to 'them'

- ◆ Avoid a shopping basket. You tend to fill them up with products you never wanted
- ◆ When a store promises lower prices, check out for the weight marked on the packet. It may be less. The actual weight may also be less than the claim on the pack. Avoid products priced irrationally like Rs.4.99 instead of Rs.5
- ◆ '50% off' is different from 'up to 50% off' and better than the 'buy one get one free' syndrome. These offers make you consumer more of a product than you normally would.
- ◆ Looking for cheaper alternatives? Look lower down the shelves. For shopping malls, 'eye level is buy level'. Children would find lower shelves stuffed with their products
- ◆ We look as we read and write left to right. Supermarkets keep the cheaper items on the right. Costliest ones are found on the left
- ◆ 'Recently reduced prices' is another fake bargain. The rates were never actually so high. We buy because it appears to be a bargain
- ◆ Essential items and popular ones are always kept in the middle of the aisles. It ensures that we go through all the other products before even sighting the intended purchase. Supermarkets bank on our impulse to buy.
- ◆ 'Rewards Cards' are generously offered to make us spend more once we own the card. It is not to help us save money but to get us buying products we don't normally buy
- ◆ Keep children off the payment counter. The counters are filled with sweets. Apart from tempting adults, they prove irresistible to children pestering parents who succumb soon.
- ◆ Look for free samples they're found aplenty in supermarkets. (Source: Utusan Konsumer)



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