

Education about Food Safety among Consumers

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Abstract—Consumer education is basically an education which brings about behavioral changes in a person who goes to market to buy anything. The consumer is totally confused what to do and what not to do. Ultimately deciding to buy which he doesn't need at all, though there is advancement in education yet most of the consumers are unaware of their rights like right to safety, right to be heard, to seek redress, to be adequately informed and consumer education. Food and Consumer Education focuses on equipping consumers with health and nutrition knowledge as well as literacy in consumer education. The knowledge and skills are critical for consumers to make informed decisions concerning their diet with the resources available (such as finance and time) for self, family and the community. For food products, Section 23 r/w Rule 32 of the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 confers on consumers a right to be informed whether or not the article of food is vegetarian or non-vegetarian. As regards drugs and cosmetics, necessary amendments have not been made in the relevant statute. The packages of non-vegetarian products should bear a symbol giving their non-vegetarian origin and a package of a vegetarian product should also bear a symbol. Public health interventions thought that if consumers were able to watch their diet they would reverse the trend. Therefore, consumer have to consider the following actions taken by Government which encourages healthy decisions like clear front of pack nutrition labeling, health claims that consumers can trust, improving labeling of food eaten outside home, reformulation to reduce fat, sugar and salt levels, responsible food marketing etc. Hence it is necessary for consumers to gain knowledge about food safety and consumer education to improve their quality of life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Now a days, the market is loaded with a variety of goods and services which confuses the consumers, how to decide and for what and how much? The consumer is constantly exploited by the market men like the producers, traders and the shopkeepers. Consumer education is basically an education which brings about behavioral changes in a person who goes to market to buy anything. Consumer education is the process of gaining the knowledge and skills needed in managing consumer resources and taking actions to influence the factors which affect consumer decisions. Consumer education addresses four issues i.e. consumer decision making economics, personal finance, rights and responsibilities.

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consumers are unaware of their rights like right to safety, right to be heard, to seek redress, to be adequately informed and consumer education.



In order to protect the consumer rights, Consumer Protection Act, 1986 (CPA) was made by the government. It protects the interests of the consumers in the widest range possible. The CPA gives the rights to the consumers to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, standard and price of goods or services so as to be protected against unfair trade practices. Though CPA came into force in 1986 it had the provision empowering consumers to seek information regarding goods or services under proper legislation. After the passing of Right to Information Act (RTI) in 2005, consumers may now seek information under this Act. Consumers may file a complaint under the RTI with respect to goods or services before the appropriate authority. The District forum may give orders for one or more of the following relief namely :

- Removal of the defects from the goods.
- Replacement of the goods with new goods of similar description.
- Return of the price or charges paid by the consumers.
- Grant of compensation for the loss or injury suffered due to the negligence of opposite party.

- Removal of defects or deficiencies in the services in question.
- Projecting right choices for the safety and health of consumers and the environment.
- Discontinuance of unfair trade practices or restrictive trade practices or their repetition.
- Withdrawal of the hazardous goods from being offered to sale, or.
- Award of adequate costs to parties.

Modern technological developments have no doubt made a great impact on the quality, availability and safety of goods and services. But the fact of life is that the consumers are still victims of unscrupulous and exploitative practices. Exploitation of consumers assumes numerous forms such as adulteration of food, spurious drugs, dubious hire purchase plans, high prices, poor quality, deficient services, deceptive advertisements, hazardous products, black marketing and many more but consumers are mainly exploited in food items.

Hence, the present conceptual paper mainly focuses on education about food safety among consumers.

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SYMBOLS IN REFERENCE TO INDIA



Food and Consumer Education focuses on equipping consumers with health and nutrition knowledge as well as

literacy in consumer education. The knowledge and skills are critical for consumers to make informed decisions concerning their diet with the resources available (such as finance and time) for self, family and the community. Consumers directly affect the safety of foods through their food handling and preparation practices. Hence, educating and informing the public about food safety as an important means for reducing many health problems for improving their quality of life.

For many years, public health interventions focused on consumer responsibility. It was thought that if consumers were able to watch their diet consumer would reverse the trend. Yet non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer, have become the first killer worldwide and obesity now surpasses malnourishment as the world's leading food and nutrition problem.

The availability of unhealthy food, which is recognized by the WHO as a risk factor underlying the worldwide epidemic of non-communicable diseases, alongside difficulties to identify and find healthy food are two major issues which need to be addressed. Consumer need a food environment which fosters supports and promotes healthy eating by assisting consumers in making healthful decisions.

Therefore, consumers should consider the following actions made by the government which encourages healthy decisions:

2. CLEAR FRONT OF PACK NUTRITION LABELING

Front-of-pack (hereafter FOP) nutrition labeling is preferred by a large majority of consumers as information is provided where they are more likely to see it. Consumer research also found that consumers want FOP labeling to help them assess the nutritional quality of food. A color-coded scheme is one useful tool to help consumers identify products containing high levels of sugar, salt, fat and saturated fat. This particularly applies to ready meals and processed foods that often contain unexpected high levels of salt, sugar and fat.

3. HEALTH CLAIMS THAT CONSUMERS CAN TRUST

If labeling is to assist consumers into making healthier choices it must be truthful. Yet some products can appear healthier than they actually are. In the absence of nutrient profiles which allow only products with a minimum healthy profile to make health claims, food manufacturers can add vitamins and minerals to food that is high in calories and sugar (such as cakes and biscuits) and claim they have health benefits..

4. IMPROVING LABELING OF FOOD EATEN OUTSIDE HOME

It is critical to assist consumers in making healthier choices and providing calorie information on menu will help them assess the energy content of food eaten outside.

5. REFORMULATION TO REDUCE FAT, SUGAR AND SALT LEVELS

Consumer organizations found that many similar products contain diverging amounts of salt and sugar, which means there is still room for improvement. In parallel reformulation should aim to improve the nutritional quality of food meaning the 'less sugar and salt' message should be accompanied by a 'more fruits, vegetables, healthy proteins and whole grains' message. At the same time harmonized and realistic portions should be set by regulators who should also develop food standards for public institutions such as schools and hospitals.

6. RESPONSIBLE FOOD MARKETING

Food marketing often contradicts government recommendations as foods high in fat, sugar and salt are still marketed to consumers. Current controls have failed to reduce their exposure - the first recommendation set out by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to consumers.

Generally speaking our food environment should foster healthy choices. For instance supermarkets should have responsible in-store promotions and product positioning which encourages consumers to shift towards a healthier diet.

Food standards in public institutions

Hospitals, nurseries, care homes and public institutions like schools and kindergartens should create an environment where nutritious and healthy food is promoted. Patients need to get the whole benefits of a healthy diet, while children should eat a diet that helps them become healthy adults. A first step would be to set standards for food sold and served in such places. Specifically, this means menus should include several portions of fruit and vegetables, whole grains instead of refined grains as well as healthy proteins while levels of salt, sugar and saturated fat should be limited.

The food should always be transferred to a plate or bowl to make portion estimation easier and healthy food should be served first in buffet lines as external cues such as the visual or aromatic prominence of the food can make it appetizing.

In addition, junk food, such as sugary drinks, snacks and sweets should be banned from school canteens. As this is sometimes the only meal kids receive during the school day, it is critical to make it as nourishing and healthy as possible. In addition, setting standards of portions of fruit and vegetables encourages kids to eat a more varied diet and try new food.

Hence, helping consumers make healthier choices can only be achieved if they understand how our food environment influences dietary habits. Our surroundings influence what we eat, and in turn what we eat influences our health.. So, become aware of your rights and fight for your dues! Jago Grahak Jago!



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