

India's Sugar and Salt Labelling Drive: Health Ministry's Awareness Push

July 20, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com



Sugar and Salt Labelling Latest News

- The Health Ministry has instructed all government departments to prominently display the oil and sugar content of popular Indian snacks such as samosa, vada pav, kachori, pizza, and burger.
- This information must be shared in cafeterias, lobbies, meeting rooms, and even on government stationery, aiming to promote awareness of unhealthy food consumption.

Sugar and Oil Display Boards to Promote Healthy Eating

- The Union Health Ministry has proposed the installation of sugar and oil content display boards in schools, offices, and public institutions to raise awareness about hidden fats and sugars in everyday foods.
- These boards are intended to act as visual behavioural nudges encouraging healthier dietary choices.
- The proposal also includes printing health messages on all official stationery—such as letterheads, envelopes, notepads, and folders—to serve as daily reminders in the fight against obesity.

Warning Labels Aimed at Tackling Rising Lifestyle Diseases

- The Health Ministry has introduced warning labels on food items to raise public awareness and encourage moderation in consumption.
- This initiative comes in response to a sharp rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which now account for over 66% of deaths in India, particularly affecting those above the age of 30.
- Conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory illnesses, and cancers are becoming major public health concerns.
- Experts highlight that excess intake of sodium, added sugars, refined oils, and sugary drinks—often marketed as healthy—contribute to poor metabolic health.
- Additionally, many people fail to consume enough fibre, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fermented foods, further worsening nutritional gaps.
- Even functional snacks, which claim to offer health benefits, can contribute to these risks.

How Nutrient Values Are Measured and Why It Matters

- Nutrient values of food are determined through laboratory analysis of prepared foods and presented per 100 grams for clarity.
- These assessments focus on total sugar, saturated fat, and salt content. When lab testing isn't feasible, values are estimated using ingredient data from the **Indian Food Composition Tables (IFCT)**, published by ICMR-NIN.
- The 2024 Dietary Guidelines for Indians define **High Fat, Sugar, and Salt (HFSS) foods** as those where sugar provides over 10% of energy, fat exceeds 15%, and salt exceeds 625 mg per 100g.
- Such foods, often highly processed and nutrient-poor, contribute to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.
- The ICMR-NIN backs the government's awareness drive on HFSS foods, especially to protect children and youth from rising non-communicable diseases.

Unhealthy Snacks: It's About Content, Not Origin

- Any food—whether Indian or Western, homemade or packaged—can be unhealthy if it contains excessive sugar, salt, or fat.
- According to experts, the focus should be on a snack's nutritional profile rather than its type or origin.
- The Health Ministry's efforts aim to raise awareness and encourage healthier choices through non-punitive behavioural nudges.
- These initiatives align with broader programmes like **Eat Right India**, **Poshan Abhiyaan**, **Fit India**, and **the National NCD Control Programme**, all aimed at promoting informed food decisions and improving public health.

Guidelines on Sugar and Salt Intake for a Healthier Life

- The World Health Organization recommends a balanced diet to prevent malnutrition, non-communicable diseases like heart disease and diabetes, and to boost overall immunity.

- For Indian adults, the advised daily intake is less than 65 grams of total fat, under 25 grams of added sugar, and below 5 grams of salt.
- Children have specific limits based on their age. Nutrition experts stress the importance of building meals around fibre-rich foods, local produce, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- They encourage home-cooked meals, mindful eating, and consistency in healthy choices over rigid dieting trends for long-term well-being.

Source: TH | PIB

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