

## **Health management it's all in food labels**

**\*Prof Dr pranab k. Bhattacharya**

\*Senior Professor (Management Studies), Kardan University, Kabul, Afghanistan, and former Asst. General Manager (Mktg.), HMT Limited, Pinjore, Haryana.

### **Abstract**

In today's fiercely competitive foodie world, commercialising of various food products has since been growing by leaps and bounds. And trust me readers, it is here to stay now and ever.

Most of us eager to simply use the contents inside the pack instead of seriously looking for the important information written on the labels forcing us at a stage popularly known as 'synchronised sinking' on the health front.

*Keywords: Commercialising, Embedding, Fiercely, Foodie, Synchronised sinking*

### **Introduction**

Here is a concern attached on the health management issue, precisely covering on Food Pack Labelling in our country, India. Though, there are proper legislations in place, yet consumers, especially the younger generation, keep themselves blissfully unaware on the information written on it, which may cause serious health hazards if not followed.

Beside wilful negligence shown on the part of even literate consumers, what additionally lacks today in our food processing industry is: we have not seriously tried to market the importance of label reading awareness enough and scientifically.

In other words, we haven't done enough PR at this vulnerable front at all. While a lot should be done by every stakeholder, I personally feel that one section that would really matter and eventually play a lead role towards genetically embedding public awareness in the corporate board rooms is the elementary educational institutions, the primary decision makers for most of these food varieties.

We all consume packaged foods one way or the other. At a time when the fast-paced urban and semi-urban lives are increasingly witnessing a compelling trend of dual-income seeking nucleus families having hardly any time at their watch to emulate those age-old kitchen luxuries, finding the packaged entities much convenient and comfortable too.

However, imagine these food stuffs without any information on their packs! I am sure, we shall not be in a position to eventually know what's inside.

We are what we eat. Choosing our own foods need wiser selections from an array of vast variety. Label reading tells us about the ingredients, nutrients contents, shelf-lives, manufacturer's details and many more information.

Specific guidance is actually being enforced by the Indian Packaging and Labelling Regulations, 2011 with Legal Metrology on board and its enumerable amendments coming from time to time in the arena of pack labelling.

### **Package Printing Contents**

The front of the pack contains necessarily the manufacturer's brand name, visual image of the product kept inside, vegetarian or non-vegetarian symbols etc., while the backside of the label displays information like net weight, maximum retail price, manufacturing date, batch code, manufacturer's address and customer care contact details.

Besides the above, it also mentions 'shelf life' i.e. best before use date, after which nutrients or tastes or flavours of the product may get drastically compromised.

Latest labelling amendments also advises the manufacturer to also print 'storage instructions' details which would obviously guide the consumers on how to store the foods in retaining its original quality. It also provides 'cooking methods' to be followed as how best to cook the food by not surrendering its nutritive values. It also gives 'allergen information' mentioning contains of traces of milk, nuts, mustard, soya etc., if any, that could eventually cause allergy to certain type of consuming people.

### **Symbol Recognition**

In the quest of getting further information, one has to be acquainted with various symbols being used on food labels. For example, a green-lined square with a green dot at the centre of it denotes the food inside is of vegetarian in nature. While the same symbol in red-colour is for non-vegetarian foods, containing at least one of the ingredients from animal sources. Likewise, vegetables and fruits concentrates such as juices, jams, jellies, squashes, aerated drinks, pickles etc. must have FPO (Food Product Order) symbol as a mark of quality product.

Agricultural by products like various condiments, chilli and turmeric powders, milk substitutes such as ghee, butter, paneer, cheese and the like, though not mandatory, may have AGMARK symbol on its label as a guarantee for quality. Bureau of Indian Standards quality symbol also is in use voluntarily on certain food labels which is, however, mandatory for all bottled water now.

In order to educate, especially the GenNext and also the general public of India, under a project on 'Effect of school based communication intervention on reading of food labels among urban adolescents', Dr. G. M. Subba Rao, Principal Investigator, National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, a wing of Indian Council of Medical Research, has done extensive research on the extent of 'most necessary information' to be marked on the food labels and sent urgent recommendations to the concerned authorities for strict compliance. Recently, NIN has also brought out a 'Food Label Reading Information Kit', in the form of a brochure, to propagate a major public awareness campaign, starting for the kinds at school level.

### **Ingredients Check**

To know with what our food is made of, cross checking the claims of ingredients contained in it, is a very important task. Ingredients contained in the foods photographic image displayed on the pack needs to be clearly mentioned. For example, ingredients contained within a potato chips packet are written, such as potato flakes, wheat flour, edible vegetable oil, edible starch, sugar, spices and condiments (paprika extracts, powders of onion, chilli, garlic, cinnamon, ginger, clove etc.), salt, tomato powder, antioxidant, citric acid, natural colours, added flavouring substances like butter, vanilla etc., and the like.

Similarly, also getting acquainted with the nutrition information, as declared by the manufacture, which is provided as per 100g or per 100ml or per serving. An example for the nutritional information is provided for the readers' knowledge at Table.1 below.

Table.1

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION (After popping)	Quantity (Approx) per 100g
Energy (Kcal)	509
Protein (g)	8
Carbohydrate (g)	74
-Sugar (g)	0
-Dietary Fibre (g)	15
Total Saturated Fat (if content is > 0.5%)	35
-Saturated Fatty Acids (g)	13
-Poly Unsaturated Fatty Acids (g)	5
-Mono Unsaturated Fatty Acids (g)	12
-Trance Fatty Acids (g)	0
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Sodium (g)	0.7
Calcium (mg)	148

Source: NIN Bulletin, July, 2014

Though the information on sodium content is, however, not mandatory, yet knowledge of its presence ultimately helps a lot to the health conscious consumers.

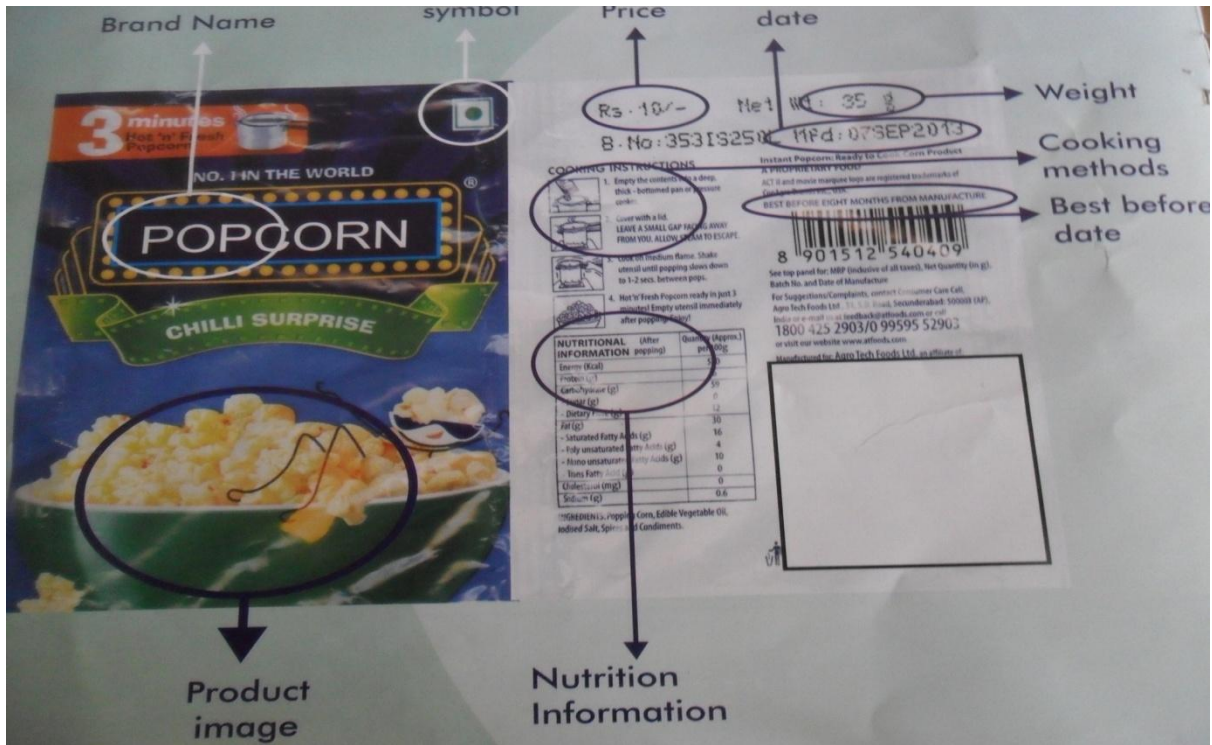
### Health Check

A distinct relationship always exists between food and health. This check obviously percolates into three different functions, namely, i) Nutrient functions, ii) Disease risk reduction functions, and iii) Any other functions.

- i) Nutrient functions: It essentially ensures that a food has its own particular nutritional properties. One should not be misled by the fact that only similar foods in similar amounts can only be compared for nutrition values.
- ii) Disease risk reduction function: The information pertaining to ingredients and nutritional values are very important which would in turn reduce the risk from attacks of various diseases. One should only choose healthy foods and say NO to high fat sodium and sugar foods.
- iii) If someone is negligent in using the label information properly, it may end up choosing unhealthy foods, detriment to health.

A typical display of label is given at Figure.1 below showing useful noting therein apprising the consumers what necessary information we generally come across.

Figure.1



Source: Author's own collection, 2014

**Conclusion & Suggestions**

Calorie balancing is the ultimate buzzword. Intake of unhealthy foods misbalances between the equation of ‘calories we eat’ and ‘calories we spend’. Fat, especially, the saturated fatty acid, Trans fat, sodium and free sugars can be major creators of diseases like hypertension, acute heart diseases, diabetes and even killer cancer.

Taking cognisance of label information is one of the prerequisite for everyone especially for the health conscious people. One shall only gain and never loss with that information thus provided in every product labels.

It is suggested that an awareness campaign on the importance of label reading and implementing those gained knowledge in day to day uses of such products be infused in the academic curriculum for the students from elementary level onwards. This emphasis will create a nationwide health consciousness and promote a clear understanding on how its citizen’s health matters on the overall growth of a nation.

**Reference**

1. Carp, Douglas, Donald Leslie and James Lichtenberg (2008), Tiny Trackers; Use of Labelling by Consumers, *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, New Jersey, USA*, 53(5): 169, 26-29p.
2. Coyle, Karen (2013), “Management of Food Label Information”, *Journal of Health Nutrition, New York*, Vol.3, No.7, pp. 48-49.
3. Subba Rao, Dr. G. M (2014), “Effect of school based communication intervention on reading of food labels among urban adolescents”, *Special Bulletin, National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), ICMR, Hyderabad*, Vol.1, No.1, pp. 06-16.