

Sweet but toxic poison?

It is an old saying “the healthier the food, better the health.” Every parent is aware of the importance of giving wholesome nutritious diet to children which is integral to their normal physical, mental, and emotional development. However, fruits and vegetables have never been an easy sell to children. Host of phrases echo down the generations, as parents try to cajole and encourage their children to eat healthy and nutritious food saying that it will make them healthy and strong.

Over a period of time and with the liberalization of economy, the Indian markets have been flooded with numerous brands selling prepackaged foods, fast foods, etc., which have caught the fancy of the Indian consumers. The industry is now a multibillion industry, which have big bucks to advertise and attractively package their products. Although the parent is aware and understands the health benefits of eating wholesome, home cooked food by a child, many a times the children are seldom encouraged to consume fruits as a snack and in contrast they are allowed to gorge on junk food. Most junk foods contain high level of trans-fats in the form of salts and sugar which can lead to ill health and diseases like diabetes, obesity, and dental caries. There has been a drastic shift in eating practices especially in the Indian context as meal times were considered a ritual of eating home food sitting together with family members. This could be attributed to numerous factors such as hectic lifestyle, working parents, and nuclear families, and so burgers and chips have substituted the natural food. Observing the drastic effects of junk foods on human health, the onus of good health of a child lies with the parent to make informed choices. The Centre for Science and Environment in India conducted a survey of well-known brands of foods consumed, particularly by children and they have confirmed that companies resort to large-scale misbranding and misinformation, regarding their products containing zero trans-fats. This claim has been found to be fortified and many products are found to contain heavy amounts of trans-fats in the form of salt and sugar.

With the younger generation being lured and tempted to junk foods, they are vulnerable to numerous ill effects such as heart diseases, diabetes, and dental caries in the prime of their life. If companies misrepresent and mislead the masses by concealing and hiding the factual information required



by law, companies can be sued and made to mend through the Advertising Standards Council and if it is confirmed that the advertisements are deceptive and misleading, the advertisements can be stopped!

Till such time as there is no law, ban, or prohibition, the companies will enjoy unbridled freedom and continue to sell their products of junk food/intoxicants openly on all outlets. But before resorting to this exercise, it is essential to win over public opinion to disband the production of such foods by laying stress on the government for making stringent rules with harsh punishment.

Indians, who were consuming traditional and ethnic foods, are now consuming junk foods more often and also that this poses a major threat and risk to national health. Multimedia advertisements have increased the sale of junk foods not only among the cities but also have penetrated among the rural population and their products have reached rural markets (and even in remote areas) also in the form of potato chips and soft drinks. It is again disheartening to realize that we may or may not find a school or ration shop in the villages, but the availability of junk foods is very easy. Whatsoever the reason, logic, or excuse we may give, the hazardous effects of this junk food are enormous and cannot be denied. Leave alone the fact that it causes obesity and diabetes or tooth decay. It also makes the children becoming obese and they can die before their parents due to health-related problems. In reality, junk foods are sweet poison which is injurious and detrimental to the cause of health and they should be banned and discarded to safeguard and protect human health.

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code:	Website: www.contemplindent.org
	DOI: 10.4103/0976-237X.95092



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How to cite this article: Damle SG. Sweet but toxic poison?. Contemp Clin Dent 2012;3:S1.