

Letter to Editor

Why we should be worried about the future of nutrition

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Dear Editor,

There are more than 50 names for “sugars”. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) which is the statutory body for food safety and regulation in India have termed only monosaccharides and disaccharides to be classified under sugars and added sugars which is similar to the definition of the term “sugars” as per WHO guidelines on sugar intake for adults and children (1, 2). Table 1 depicts some of the different names for sugars which shows that there are not only monosaccharides and disaccharides but also polysaccharides in the mix (3). Maltodextrin, a polysaccharide (D-glucose units) is used as a food additive and flavour enhancer. One of its functions is that it mitigates sweetness which allows for overutilization without the excessive sweetness. It also has a high glycemic index value of 85–105 (4), hence, it should be used with caution. Curtaining of ingredients by avoiding the scope of restriction makes the quantity of sugar consumed (in pre-packed foods, sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB), malt-based drinks and health drinks, etc) difficult to identify and incapacitates individuals who inadvertently over consume sugars.

Although many of these compounds have an origin in nature (such as wheat, corn,

cane, soya, beet, or from animal sources, as per NOVA food classification (no acronym) (5-7), the term ultra-processed foods can be used for these ingredients as they are created by series of industrial techniques and processes. Also, their uses are highly profitable with a longer shelf-life, lower cost and are hyper-palatable. With the help of marketing and unvalidated health claims, individuals may easily choose them as an alternative to freshly prepared or home cooked foods (8-11).

Table 1: List of different names utilised for “sugars”

Group	Name
Easy-to-recognize-as-sugar	honey, cane sugar, cane juice, syrup, glucose, sucrose, maltose, fructose, levulose, sweet, or sweetener
Hidden names of sugar	high-fructose corn syrup, maltodextrin, agave nectar, barley malt, cane juice crystals, caramel, dehydrated cane juice, dextrin, dextrose, evaporated cane juice, fruit juice, fruit juice concentrate, maltol, mannose, molasses, muscovado, panaocha, saccharose, and treacle

As per World Health Organization (WHO), the burden of obesity has more than doubled in a span of 40 years. The prevalence of both overweight and obesity

among the age group of 5-19 years in both boys and girls has seen a dramatic rise to more than 18% in 2016 (12). A study by Hall DK et al showed that there is a significant impact of consuming ultra-processed foods on body weight (13). There is also a growing trend in take-home purchases for sweet- and salty- foods in the Indian population (14). The learnings and actions related to nutrition and healthy lifestyle of the younger generations can get translated into their youth and adult life (15).

Consumer awareness is paramount and food labelling is the first tool for consumers. Nutrition labels are presented with an intention to guide the consumers in food selection (16). Currently, nutrition food labels are only available to a subset of the general population who are able to read and write in the English language and not in any particular regional languages. Widespread awareness regarding consuming ultra-processed foods among school- and college- going students through Information, Education and Communication (IEC) modules and health educational sessions is paramount.

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