



Steps to check adulterants in food items

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E-paper

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has launched a campaign “Eat Right India” in Nagaland in collaboration with the State health and family welfare department with the objective of helping consumers make the right decision while buying food products, including fruits and vegetables, from the market. On Wednesday, FSSAI demonstrated how to detect food adulterants by using easy to Do-It-Yourself (DIYs) kits with readily available chemicals and household items at Wednesday Bazaar in Super Market and in front of Big Bazaar hyper mart at Clock Tower junction. The demonstrations were conducted by Dimapur Food and Safety Officer (FSO) Samuel Zehol along with FSOs from other districts and FSSAI officials. Khrukutolu Veswuh, food analyst from Kohima-based State Public Health Laboratory (SPHL), demonstrated how presence of adulterants in food items could be checked by using simple techniques, besides considering other aspects while buying packaged food items.



Liquid and powdered milk: Among the most commonly used adulterant in milk and milk powder is starch. When added to liquid milk, starch makes milk appear thicker, thereby giving a false impression that it is pure. Also, when starch is mixed with milk powder, it turns white like maida or flour, unlike the light yellowish tinge in pure milk powder.

A simple way to check if starch is added to milk or milk powder is by pouring a few drops of iodine on it. If the milk turns black, it is mixed with starch. And if the milk is pure, it would show the colour of iodine solution, which is dark orange.

Honey: When pure honey is poured into a glass of water, it settles at the bottom in a clump without dissolving. In case honey is adulterated with jaggery and sugar, it will immediately dissolve into the water and the adulterants will be visible.

Tea leaf powder: Artificial colouring agents are added to tea leaf powder to increase the weight. When a handful of tea leaf powder is added to a glass of water at room temperature, it will gradually settle at the bottom. In case, an artificial colouring agent is added, the colour of water will change. If there is no change in colour of water, no colouring agent has been added.

Kesari dal: Kesari dal was banned by the government in 1961 because scientists and medical experts claimed that it is known to cause lathyrism, a condition that is characterised by paralysis of lower limbs and numbness in limbs and spine. The ban was however revoked in 2016.

As kesari dal looks like arhar dal, it is sometimes mixed with arhar dal by unscrupulous traders to increase profit. Packets were kept on display at Super Market and near Big Bazaar to help consumers know the difference.

Artificial colour in vegetables: A common artificial colouring agent used to make vegetables appear fresh is malachite green, a carcinogenic chemical used as synthetic dye and controversially even used in aquaculture.

To the naked eye, it is very difficult to find out if malachite green is smeared on green vegetables. A simple way of finding out if malachite green is used on a vegetable is by dipping a small cotton ball into a vaseline solution and rubbing it on the vegetable. If the cotton ball turns green, it indicates the use of malachite green.

Khrukutolu stressed that no artificial colouring agent, permitted or otherwise, should be used in any fresh food items, including vegetables and fruits.

Misbranded items: Another major health concern, according to the food analyst, was packaged edible items from Myanmar in which even human hair and sand have been found. These items do not have nutritional content, batch numbers, manufacturing and expiry dates and addresses of manufacturers, he added.

Fortified items: Edible or food items that claim to be fortified with vitamins and minerals should have a blue coloured “F+” symbol on the packet. The packet should also specify what minerals and vitamins have been used to fortify it. But in doing so, the taste or composition should not be altered, Veswuh pointed out.

Potable water: Potability of water can be tested with the help of a testing liquid within barely a few seconds in a laboratory. The water that is consumed is sometimes known to contain faeces and ammonia. Earlier in the day, a “Swasth Bharat Yatra” morning walk was flagged off by chief medical officer (CMO) Dr Vikato Kinimi around 5 am. The walk was led by FSSAI assistant director Madan Mohan Khantwal and food safety deputy director Dr Obanjungla. The vote of thanks was delivered by deputy CMO Dr Antoly Suu. NCC cadets from various schools in Nagaland actively participated in the event.