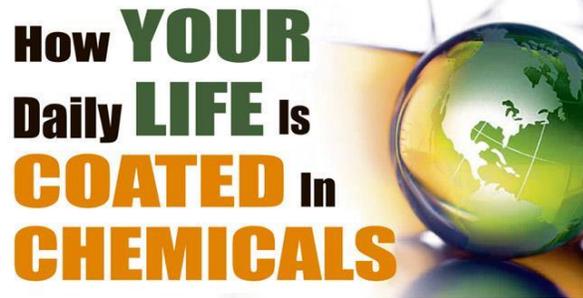




## Modern food habits and hazards



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Published on 25 Jun. 2018 12:33 AM IST

Use of harmful substances for food preservation or addition, has been reported in the past but only recently acknowledge by the state government through the branch of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). There is a list of substances used in a whole range of food products ranging from bread, bakery items, raw fish, and meat products etc. which are considered unsafe and harmful when ingested.

Food additives are substances added to food to preserve flavour or improve its taste and appearance. Unfortunately many of these enhancers are also known to cause cancer. Here are some food additives that are being used in India, despite banning them in many countries due to side effects.

Fish imported from faraway places such as South or North India takes around ten to fifteen days to reach distant places. In order make the fish look fresh, wholesale dealers inject formalin, a toxic and carcinogenic chemical commonly used to preserve dead bodies in

mortuaries, to prevent fish from deteriorating during transportation.

Pork meat is the top dish in many parts of India and demand outstrips supply. Some growers are known to use hormones or steroids for fast growth. A feature is that the pig eats very little but drinks plenty of liquid. Since the hormones or steroids survive digestion, some worry they could cause harmful effects in humans.

FSSAI Nagaland branch had also cautioned consumers against any packaged drinking water not having BIS certification of FSSAI and sale of which invites liability and punishment with imprisonment under FSSAI Act. In addition to use of formaldehyde for preserving fish or packaged water sold without FSSAI certificate, even use of common plastic for packaging water is also found to be harmful in the long run. A report stated that as plastic affects human health, toxic chemicals leach out of plastic and are found in the blood and tissue of nearly all people. Prolonged consumption of water packaged in ordinary untreated plastic was suspected to be linked to cancers, birth defects, impaired immunity, endocrine disruption and other ailments.

The market is also flooded with food items that are adulterated with artificial non-edible colours found in powdered spices and also using Carbide Gas for artificially ripening of fruits that are very harmful for human consumption.

For the uninitiated, preservatives are a type of food additive that is put into packaged food to prolong its shelf life, enhance the taste or keep the colour and nutrients of the product intact.

Another harmful substance used in food items-- Propyl gallate- an antioxidant preservative is used to prolong life of fats and oils-- such as in vegetable oil, chewing gum, meat products, and chicken soup base. It was also said that prolonged use of items having propyl

gallate may cause cancer.

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) is also believed to cause allergies including chest pains, headache, sweating, flushing, numbness or a burning sensation around the mouth etc. FSSAI had also banned use of potassium bromate as food additive in wake of a Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) study flagging their harmful effects on health, including causing cancer.

BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole) and BHT (butylated hydroxytoluene), banned in the UK, Japan and many other European countries, are widely used by the food industry as preservatives in cereal, baked goods, packaging, cosmetics, snack foods, chewing gum, meats, butter, dehydrated potatoes, beer etc.

Arsenic is highly toxic in its inorganic form and rice has higher levels of inorganic arsenic than other foods. It is banned only in the European Union.

Olestra is a 'fake' fat found in foods like chips and French fries. It can have a harmful effect to health by negating the body's ability to absorb essential vitamins. This fat substitute is banned in the UK and Canada.

Gluten is banned in other parts of India including Delhi . It is a general name for the proteins found in rye, barley and triticale. Gluten helps foods maintain their shape, acting as a glue that holds food together such as in bread and bakery products. Gluten containing wheat protein is like a papercut or splinter digging into the lining of the gut, causing an inflammatory response.

Oils used in fast food are also found to be harmful. In many cases, fast food is highly processed and contains large amounts of carbohydrates, added sugar, unhealthy fats and sodium. The Delhi Government ordered a crackdown on junk food that is sold in schools

and within 50 meters of them. Eating foods can increase LDL (bad) cholesterol, lower HDL (good) cholesterol, and increase risk for type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

There are also many eateries using recycled oil several times. Reusing cooking oil increases the cholesterol, creates peroxides acid, causes cancer, attacks organ cells and can infect the white blood cells.

More stringent checks in the market are needed but so far all those responsible departments seem to be dormant except issuing press releases at some intervals. Even in the recent case, FSSAI had not undertaken any field inspections beyond issuing a press statement.

### **6000 kg of formalin-laced fish seized**

Thiruvananthapuram, Jun 24: In a major haul, 6,000 kg of fish, preserved in toxic chemical Formalin, was seized at the border check post of Walayar in northern Palakkad district on Sunday.

The state Food Safety department officials foiled the attempt to ferry the chemical-mixed fish from Andhra Pradesh during a raid carried out as part of the 'Operation Sagar Rani,' a drive launched to ensure safety and hygiene at fish handling and distribution centres. As many as 6000 kg of prawns, brought in 45 lorries, was found mixed with Formalin, officials said.

Last week, 12,000 kg of toxic fish, containing Formalin, was confiscated during raids in the state.

Formalin is used to preserve dead bodies and prevent its decay in mortuaries. The widespread use of the deadly chemical nowadays in the preservation of fish, fruit and other food items is posing a great threat to public health.