Sugar Processed Foods

Why in news?

As per recent report Nestle's products for babies in Asia, Africa and Latin America were found to contain added sugars, while the same products sold in Europe did not have it.

Regulation of sugar
• **Sugar**- It is the generic name for sweet-tasting, soluble carbohydrates, many of which are used in food. • **Artificial sweeteners-** They are sugar substitutes that are used to sweeten foods and beverages with very little to no calories. • **Regulation**- Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations 2018, the FSSAI said that only if total sugar is less than 5g per 100g in a product, it can claim to be 'low on sugar.' Any product which is 'low on sugar,' can potentially be healthy. • **WHO**- World Health Organisation has advised against the introduction of added sugars before the age of 2, it also recommends limiting free sugar intake to less than 10% of total energy intake with future benefits by reducing intake to less than 5% of total energy.

What are the key highlights of recent report on Nestle's products?

- **Report by**- Public Eye in collaboration with the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)
- **Discrepancy in nutritional standard**- Nestle was criticized for applying different nutritional standards in different countries.
- **High level of sugar**- Baby food products marketed in *low and middle-income countries* as healthy and essential for children's development were found to contain high levels of added sugars, similar products sold in Switzerland where Nestle is headquartered did not contain added sugars.
- **Lack of transparency**- The report pointed out that Nestle did not provide clear information about the quantity of sugar content on the packaging of its products, this could *mislead parents* into believing that these products are healthier than they actually are.
- **Health risks**- The presence of added sugars in baby food products poses risks to children's health, excessive sugar consumption can contribute to various health issues including obesity, diabetes and dental problems.
- **Poor diet habits**- Introducing babies to sweet tastes at a young age may also reinforce a preference for sugary foods, leading to poor dietary habits later in life.

What are the harmful effects of added sugars particularly for babies?

- **Nutritional impact**- Consuming foods high in added sugars can lead to imbalances in the diet, potentially displacing more nutritious foods and nutrients.

- **Impact on health**- Excessive sugar intake is associated with an increased risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and dental caries. Babies and young children are especially vulnerable to these health risks due to their developing bodies and eating habits.

  Indian Council of Medical Research study estimates that 101.3 million people in India could be diabetic.

- **Long term effects**- Experts warn that high sugar intake can put pressure on *baby's pancreas* potentially leading to diabetes and obesity in the future, excess sugar can turn into triglycerides, leading to *fatty liver and insulin resistance*.
- **Regional health disparity**- World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a warning about the alarming *increase in obesity* rates, especially in low and middle-income countries, where it has escalated to "epidemic proportions."
- **Surge in NCDs**- The rise in obesity is contributing to a surge in non-communicable diseases like *cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes*. One of the primary culprits behind this epidemic is the heightened consumption of highly processed foods that are often loaded with sugar.
- **Impact of Maltodextrin**- Maltodextrin is used to enhance the flavour and texture but has *higher glycemic index* than a table sugar, which can quickly raise blood sugar levels.

  Glycemic index is a measure used to determine how much a food can affect your blood sugar levels.

- **Addictive nature**- Sugar has addictive properties and can lead to carvings for sweet foods, this may predispose them to develop a preference for sweet tastes potentially leading to overconsumption of sugary foods in the future.
- **Tooth decay-** Early exposure to sugar, especially through frequent consumption of sugary foods and beverages can increase the risk of tooth decay and dental cavities in infants and young children.

What lies ahead?

- Government authorities are warning against branding items with added sugar as "healthy" and have called out *misleading promotion* and marketing tactics.
- Ministry of Consumer Affairs has asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India to initiate *appropriate action* against the Nestle group for allegedly selling baby products with high sugar content in India.
- The impact of high sugar processed food is a *global health concern*, hence it underscores the need for better dietary practices and policies to combat these trends.

Quick facts

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

• **Establishment** - It is a statutory body established under the *Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006*.
• **Ministry** - *Ministry of Health & Family Welfare*.
• **Headquarters -** Delhi
• **Function -** To regulate and monitor, manufacture, processing, distribution, sale and import of food while ensuring safe and wholesome food to the consumers.
• To protect and promote public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety.
• **State Food Safety Index-** It is released annually by FSSAI to measure the performance of states on parameters of food safety.

References

1. Indian Express- Why sugar harmful?
2. The Hindu- Sugary processed foods harmful

