

# Is '100 per cent fruit juice' healthy for blood sugar?

As FSSAI recommends takedown of misleading labels on packaged juices, know why added sugar harms you

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**P**ACKAGED BEVERAGES with a "100 per cent fruit juice" label on them are nothing but fruit concentrates diluted with water. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has ordered manufacturers to take down labels making tall claims from their products, saying they are misleading. Describing them as reconstituted juices, it said, "The major ingredient... is actually water and the ingredient (fruit), for which the claim is being made, is only present in limited concentrations."

## What are reconstituted juices?

Reconstituted fruit juices are those that are manufactured by adding water to the concentrate or pulp extracted from a fruit. These concentrates may also be heat-treated to kill microbes. Most commercially available juices are prepared in this manner. "A whole fruit is usually made of 80 per cent water, the nutri-

ents and fibres comprising the rest. A fruit concentrate is prepared by removing this water, so it is essentially concentrated nutrients. There is nothing wrong with that, it is healthy. However, when it is reconstituted with water, it is diluted further to make it look like the juice from many fruits. For example, you can get 50 ml of juice from an orange. But it can be used to create 100 or 200 ml of reconstituted juice in a diluted form," says Ritika Samaddar, regional head, Department of Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics, Max Healthcare.

The reconstituted juice, she argues, is not just diluted. It uses colouring agents and additives for flavour and aroma to mimic natural juices, making them unhealthy.

## What's the health impact of having packaged juices?

Samaddar says that manufacturers add sugars to give the juices a natural sweet taste. Usually, they use high fructose corn syrup in small quantities that does not need to be declared on the label as per norms. "The syrup may be in negligible amounts but is an added



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sugar all the same, the kind that's linked to conditions such as non-alcoholic fatty liver, obesity, insulin resistance and high triglyceride levels, among others, with prolonged use. It triggers inflammation. Consume a whole fruit at best or pulp the fruit in a juicer at home instead of falling for one that is available in the market," she advises.

She feels that juices — whether packaged or freshly prepared ones — are not healthy at all. Juices lose the fibres, which lend satiety and slow down sugar release in the bloodstream. The raw fruit even loses nutrients on juicing. If you eat the whole fruit, you might

be able to eat only one or two oranges in a day but you can easily have five or six oranges juiced. Still healthy people can consume such juices once in a while but people with diabetes should avoid it completely.

## What happens if children consume these juices?

Dr Karunesh Kumar, senior consultant of paediatric gastroenterology at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, Delhi, strictly advises against packaged juice in early childhood to negate sugar dependency. "People consider packaged juices to be healthy and hence give them to children instead of carbonated sodas. But given their added sugar, juices should not be given to toddlers, overweight or obese children. This is because consuming foods and beverages with high salt or sugar content at a very young age will prompt them to eat similar foods later in life and change their flavour preferences," he says.

If children with gastrointestinal problems consume sugary drinks, it can actually lead to bloating and diarrhoea. "Some toddlers could develop false diarrhoea — where they pass partially formed stool several times a day. It's not very common but we do see such cases," says Dr Kumar.

## NEED TO KNOW

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## What are the FSSAI directives all about?

The FSSAI has asked food manufacturers to exhaust already printed labels by September 1. Now they have to label products as "sweetened juice" if they contain more than 15 gm/kg of nutritive sweeteners, be it sugar, jaggery or corn syrup. Products made with non-nutritive sweeteners — such as aspartame that cannot be processed by the body and hence do not add calories to a drink — are exempt from this.

These norms were already mentioned in existing regulations but were being violated by some manufacturers. The food safety body is working towards ensuring healthy eating habits, with the recent direction coming months after it asked online stores to stop categorising malt or cereal-based drinks, pre-mixes, or dairy-based beverages as health drinks.

## Should we not consume any packaged drink on a hot day?

Samaddar says that hydration is the key and people must also have drinks rich in electrolytes. Although bel and watermelon can be pulped as juice at home, lemon water, buttermilk, coconut water or any form of infused water are other options.