



### **What is food fortification and why it is important**

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**E-Paper**

In 2011-2012, 21.9% of the total Indian population fell below the poverty line. Considering how populated India is, 21.9% encompasses a lot of people. One of the most severe and common byproducts of poverty is malnutrition, which is a lack of proper nutrition that is caused by a lack of availability of food. The government has done a lot in the past to alleviate and to eventually try and eradicate the problem of malnutrition.

However, it is not only the people who fall under the poverty line who suffer from problems that stem from lack of nutrition. Members of all strata of society are prone to suffering from nutrient deficiencies. In fact some deficiencies like vitamin D are so prevalent that 70% of urban India suffers from it.

Keeping in mind the issue of deficiencies, The Food Fortification Resource Centre was established under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), with its main objective being to promote large scale fortification of food.

What is fortified food? Fortification is the process of adding micronutrients into foodstuff that do not already contain them. For example, milk is often fortified with additional vitamin D, to boost its nutritional value. The aim of fortification is to help people remedy their nutritional deficiencies.

The Food Fortification Resource Centre has taken the onus of major widespread production of fortified foods, creating an '+F' logo for food the following staple foods: rice, wheat flour, salt, edible oil, and milk. The logo is a symbol of fortification, and will increase the nutritional value of the aforementioned food items.

Rice and wheat flour will be fortified with iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12.

Salt will be fortified with iron and iodine.

Edible oil and milk will be fortified with vitamins A and D.

#### **Let's take a look at some of the benefits of fortified foods:**

- Eliminate malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies.
- Provides extra nutrition at affordable costs.
- The inherent characteristics of the food remain the same even after fortification. This means that the original taste, texture, and appearance are unchanged.
- Wide scale production of fortified foods can help improve the overall nutritional problem of a country, by catering to both, the poor and the wealthy.
- The process of fortification is cost effective.

#### **Now let's look at the downside of fortified foods:**

- Only a handful of nutrients are added in the process of fortification. Other nutritional deficiencies remain untreated by the process.
- Many times, fortified food products fail to reach the poorest segments of society, who are among the worst section affected with nutritional deficiencies. Low purchasing power and a weak distribution channel are responsible for this problem.
- Fortified foods could lead to a nutritional overdose.
- Even though fortified foods aid in providing certain nutrients, in the long run you will need a substantial diet, which limits the potential of such foods in lower segments of society.

#### **Bottomline:**

In a country like India where a change in lifestyle is the need of the hour, food fortification is playing an important role in pushing boundaries, by providing more for less. The process is slowly but steadily changing food habits and is helping a nation widely devoid of nutritional food to tackle the issue. Hopefully the FSSAI initiative will reach the eyes and ears of our population and a day will come when most companies will be manufacturing fortified food products.