

## Watch what you are buying in name of health

tnn | Jun 25, 2019

New Delhi: The demand for gluten-free products has led to a host of companies offering food products without the protein allergen. But are the items all they say they are? When the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) conducted a random sampling in Delhi recently, it found nearly 10% of the products actually contained gluten.

“We are sending notices to the companies selling products as gluten-free when they are not,” said Pawan Aggarwal, CEO, FSSAI. He also noted that some companies indulge in misleading labelling, marking some food items, for example, as ‘low gluten’. “A food product meant for someone with gluten sensitivity has to be fully gluten-free. It cannot have low gluten,” Aggarwal explained. FSSAI is planning to conduct more inspections in cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Strip-based rapid tests are available in the market for making sure foods are free of gluten. But they haven’t been validated by the government, so FSSAI has asked manufacturers to apply for approval before selling them.

Many otherwise healthy people are also willing to give up the traditional chapati, bread, pasta and pizza and find alternatives in ragi, jowar and bajra. “In snacks, makhana is quite a popular option for those living gluten-free,” revealed a south Delhi retailer.

India is slowly catching up with the west in this. In the US, more than \$15.5 billion were spent on retail sales of gluten-free food in 2016. In India too, superstores now have earmarked sections for gluten-free food, said industry watchers. “Companies are exploiting people’s health fears. Gluten-free diet is a product marketed to satiate this demand as was the earlier case with organic food,” a food expert said.