

Convenience foods

Introduction

- Technological developments in the field of food processing equipment, processes and packing material have brought revolution in the development of convenience foods as per the necessity, taste as well as nutritional requirements of the consumers.
- **Meaning:** Convenience foods are commercially prepared foods designed for ease of consumption. Products designated as convenience foods are often prepared food stuffs that can be sold as hot, ready to eat dishes at room temperature, shelf stable products or as refrigerated or frozen products that require minimal preparation typically by just heating.

- Definition
- Convenience foods are defined as the products in which all or significant portion of their preparation has been transferred from consumer's kitchen to the processing plant.
- Convenience foods are those foods to which some or all of the labour for preparation has been added at the time of purchase.
- Convenience foods can be defined as foods that have undergone major processing by the manufacturer such that they require little or no secondary processing and cooking before consumption.
- A food may be classified as convenience food if it meets the criteria like
- The food must have undergone considerable amount of food preparation by manufacturer before it reaches the retailer.
- It must require minimal cooking or processing before consumption by the consumer.
- The preparation time before consumption should be minimal.

Types

- [Convenience foods](#) can be classified into three groups

1. Ready to eat foods (RTE):

- The foods that can be directly consumed from the package with or without warming, thawing and without preparation are called RTE foods.
 - **Dairy snacks:** Processed cheese, cheese spread, butter and ghee.
 - **Dairy sweets:** *Gulab jamuns, kala jamun, Rasgullas, pedhas and burfis.*
 - **Other sweets:** *Sohan papdi, sohan halwa, jilebas, Mysore paks, besan laddu* and other sweets.
 - **[Bakery products:](#)** Biscuits, bread and cakes
 - **Fried snacks:** Chips, wafers, fried legumes and other snacks.
 - **Retort processed foods:** *paneer curries, Dal fries, parathas* can be packed well in retort pouch made of polypropylene for six months. The products can be heated along with pouches and eaten as and when needed.
 - **Frozen foods:** Ice cream, *idli, chicken, kabab*, fruits and vegetables.
 - **Extruded snacks:** Cereal and pulse based, soya based extruded snacks.
 - **Traditional sweet meats:** *Modakas, laddus, madeli, karchikai and holige.*
 - **Adjuncts:** [Pickles](#), dry [chutneys](#), fruit [chutneys](#) etc

2.Ready to use foods (RTU):

Foods which need some preparation like cooking, frying and reconstitution before consumption are called ready to use foods.

Masalas: Butter chicken mix, garam masala, *chat masala*, meat *masala*, curry *masala*, *palav* mix, *puliogare* mix, *rasam* powder, *samb ar* powder, ginger and garlic paste.

Fresh cut vegetables: Carrots, beans, cabbages and others are washed and cut into slices, cubes and shreds and modified atmosphere packed.

Ready to cook foods (RTC): Noodles, instant *idli*, *dosa* and *rava idli*, mixes.

Ready to fry foods (RTF): papads, fingers chips, wafers, fryums and chicken.

Ready to reconstitute foods: *khoa* powder, *kulfi* mix, instant ice cream mix and weaning mixes.

Breakfast cereals: Corn flakes, wheat flakes, jowar and millet based flakes, pops and extruded cereals.

Canned foods: Fruits vegetables, pulps, rasagulla, jamun, curries, meat, fish and chicken.

3. Beverages

Ready to drink beverages (RTD): The drinks that can be directly consumed from container like apple, mango, straw berry and milk based beverages.

Health drink and malt shakes are available in tetra packs, with a shelf life of 4 months. Sweet *lassi* and cold coffee are available with a shelf life of 6 months. Natural fruit juices in tetra packs are sold.

Ready to serve beverages (RTS): These beverages need some preparation before serving. The beverages have to be diluted or reconstituted before use. These include fruit concentrates in different flavours, spicy tomato rasam, soup, chicken soup, instant soup powders and instant juice powders.

Importance of [convenience foods](#)

- a. Traditional foods are available at commercial level which are prepared by cottage industries and by multinational companies.
- b. Supplementation with protein rich sources and preparation of ready to eat foods would correct nutritional inadequacy and provide variety.
- c. Instant mixes are needed for all segments of population, including armies, railways and even patients.
- d. The [convenience foods](#) meet the urgent needs of situation of offering hospitality to unexpected guests and a busy house wife.
- e. Changing life style has brought about changes in eating habits that has great demand for [convenience foods](#) in Indian market.
- f. Desire for more leisure time and demand for foreign or sophisticated dishes inspired by the media and increased trend.
- g. Meets the desire to taste new products.

Need for Convenience foods

- i. Increased education and employment opportunities for women.
- ii. Large number of employed couples.
- iii. Increased industrialization and urbanization .
- iv. Large floating population due to promotion of tourism
- v. Better wages and consequently higher surplus incomes.
- vi. Changing life styles and food habits of middle income groups.
- vii. Better awareness and availability of convenience foods.
- viii. Lack of time, busy and fast moving life.

Usefulness of [convenience foods](#)

- Reliable and consistent in quality
- Available in all seasons
- Ethnic and exotic meals are readily available.
- Saving space and labour.
- Have nutritive value equal to or higher than fresh foods.
- Reduction in preparation time, and the wastage
- Allows greater variety and quality.
- Very easy to handle and attractive.
- A person unable to cook can use it easily.

Limitations of convenience foods

- Improper handling can lead to food spoilage.
- Canned foods tend to develop specific flavour.
- High initial investment is required
- More expensive than fresh foods.

Convenience foods have several advantages.

- ✓ They are time saving and handy for people with busy lives.
- ✓ They are labour saving meals, easy to prepare and cook.
- ✓ They sometimes save on fuel bills as they cook in faster time.
- ✓ They are helpful for people learning to cook, the elderly and people with physical restrictions.
- ✓ These foods are useful for unexpected situations (such as unannounced visitors or when you don't have time to shop).
- ✓ They are easy to store and will keep for a long time in a cupboard or freezer.
- ✓ They provide a wide variety of dishes which you might not try if you had to prepare these dishes from scratch.
- ✓ The quality and standard are usually consistent.

Convenience foods also have several disadvantages.

- ✗ The flavour of convenient foods is not as good as fresh food.
- ✗ Certain vitamins and minerals may be lacking due to the preservation process.
- ✗ There can be lots of additives, particularly in dried foods.
- ✗ Convenience foods are also usually very high in fat, salt and sugar, which are cheap flavourings that hide the taste of chemical preservative.
- ✗ These foods can be expensive to produce and advertise.
- ✗ The portion size is often smaller than expected.
- ✗ They may have less meat, fish or cheese than you would include in homemade foods.
- ✗ The quality of some foods might be inferior e.g. meat pies, sausage rolls or pastry can be soggy with little meat inside.
- ✗ The cooking time is sometimes increased for thawing or longer baking time.
- ✗ It is much harder to control fat, salt and sugar levels.
- ✗ The cost per serving is usually higher than with homemade foods.
- ✗ Freshly-made food items (for example, entrées and salads, side dishes and sandwiches) provided by supermarkets tend to be made without dangerous preservatives but are still frequently laden with salt, sugar and fat. They also tend to be expensive and possibly not a good choice for a family on a budget.

Food value

The food value of convenience foods can vary considerably depending on:

- origin
- manufacturing process
- producer
- whether the food is organic, genetically-modified or free from pesticides.

Dried foods can lack certain vitamins because of the preserving process. Many processed foods lack fibre or roughage, biscuits and cakes contain lots of white flour and white sugar.

Cost

Cost of convenience foods varies for many reasons, not least of all because of the preserving process, the cost of advertising and packaging. Frozen vegetables, however, can work out to be just as cheap as fresh vegetables. They also usually retain their nutrient value because they are picked and frozen quickly.