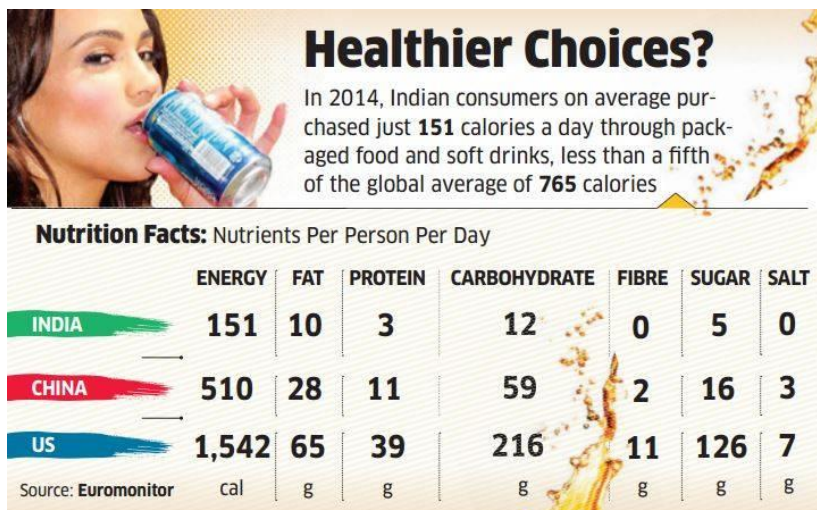


Indians consume more calories via home-made food than packaged food & drinks

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MUMBAI: You can't really blame colas, junk or processed food for obesity and diabetes in this country. Indian consumers on average purchased just 151 calories each day through packaged food and soft drinks in 2014, less than a fifth of the global average of 765 calories. In fact, India ranked among the lowest in sugar, fat, carbohydrates and salt content purchase from outside food, even as markets such as the US and



Europe consumed 10 times more in comparison, according to new findings from market researcher Euromonitor International.

Experts feel there is a mismatch in India between a relatively small packaged food and beverages industry and a large population, where everyone still doesn't buy packaged products. "Indians consume calories mostly in unpackaged format through homemade food which is generally calorie-dense compared to western countries where cooked food is protein-rich and relatively healthy but consumption of processed products is several times more," said Devendra Chawla, Future Group's president for food and FMCG business. "Also Indian consumers have preference for street food which is mostly deep-fried and calorie-rich."

India, the diabetes capital of the world, has been witnessing consumers getting health conscious and even the government considering banning junk food in schools. On the other hand, fast-food chains in India are trying to overcome criticism that the dishes they serve are unhealthy, given the amount of sugar, salt and chemical additives contained. For instance, McDonald's recently cut almost 50-60 calories on an average from all its burgers, about 40% fat content in sauces and roughly 20% sodium in fries in an effort to steer Indian consumers to lower-calorie choices.

"You have to meet the needs of consumers. If consumers are going in this (health) direction, I can't stick to the opposite direction," Amit Jatia, vice-chairman of Westlife Development, the operator of McDonald's outlets across western and southern India, told ET earlier this month. Others too have been building their menu towards the healthier side — from Coca-Cola and PepsiCo rolling out their low-calorie drinks and fruit juices to food companies such as Kellogg's and Nestle betting on products made of oats. However, two of India's largest food categories — snacks and biscuits — have seen limited experimentation with healthy portfolio and hardly any traction in terms of sales.

"For consumers, taste is still paramount and they are not really attracted by health factor even now. To balance taste and health preferences of Indian consumers is tough and such products

have seen limited success in the market," said Krishna Rao, deputy marketing manager at Parle Products. Hence, in the past few years, companies have had their share of failures — from PepsiCo's baked range of Aliva crackers, Nestle's Maggi vegetable atta noodles, GSK Consumers' Horlicks multigrain noodles to Marico and Parle withdrawing baked snack brands.

Oils and fats, bakery and dairy are the top three contributors of calories, with bakery being the leading source of protein delivering up to 5g per day, 2g more than dried processed food. At the same time, only 0.36g of fibre is purchased daily from packaged food and soft drinks in India. With 20% of the Indian population currently being overweight and obese, by 2019, each person is expected to buy 58 calories more per capita per day, according to Euromonitor.