

## Check sweets for adulteration

Be careful about the treats you buy, especially this festive season, say experts



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Milk is the most adulterated food product in the country and most sweets are made with it.

**T**he festive season brings its own challenges, and one of them is ensuring the snacks and sweets you buy are not adulterated.

“Sweets are one of the most contaminated items and with the pandemic, some may be looking to increase margins by adopting unfair methods,” says Edwina Raj, senior dietitian.

In a recent case, buckwheat (huruli) was found adulterated.

“The product is expensive and commonly used during the festive season, so manufacturers tend to add items like chalk powder or jowar flour,” she says.

The most commonly adulterated item in India is milk and most sweets are made with dairy. Food scientist Govardhan Singh says adulterants in milk may range from harmless items like water, added to increase volume, and starch, added to increase solids, to harmful items like detergent, which makes the liquid whiter, and urea, which increases protein content.

Edwina says sweets with silver foil are best avoided as they may be substituted with aluminium.

Priyanka Rohatgi, chief clinical dietician, cautions buyers against extravagant offers and low prices. “The Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) has put out new rules stating that the date of manufacture and the date of expiry must be printed on every box of sweets. Look out for markers like these,” she advises.

Is all adulterated food harmful? “Not always, but you are definitely not getting what you pay for and the nutritional value of the item is diminished with adulteration,” says Priyanka.

Edwina adds that any adulteration is a violation of trust and must be reported.

“You can complain to FSSAI and this is possible online,” says Edwina. Priyanka adds that any knowledge of adulterants should be shared in family and social circles. At the same time, she cautions consumers against rumour mongering. “There were reports of plastic eggs and such. One should be vigilant enough to realise that the cost of creating such eggs is too exorbitant to be feasible. Moreover plastic can’t be made to taste like the food it’s imitating,” she explains.

FSSAI has a section on its website for myth busting.

#### **Does Redressal work?**

The FSSAI website redirects you to two places to register a complaint. One is an app called Food Safety Connect, FSSAI, which is only available on Play Store. The app has overwhelmingly negative reviews, mostly about how users are unable to register a complaint. The second is the website foscoc.fssai.gov.in. None of the icons except for the one prompting the user to register work. Once you sign up, it doesn’t allow you to log in, rendering this medium of grievance redressal also ineffective.

#### **Check it out**

FSSAI has an extensive webpage dedicated to how to detect adulterants in a range of food items — [fssai.gov.in/dart](https://www.fssai.gov.in/dart). Govardhan Singh, food scientist, says the method used to check milk can also be used to check sweets. “Dissolve a little in water and follow the same method,” he says.

#### **How to check sweets**

- To check for the presence of starch, add a few drops of iodine into a solution of the sweet and water. If it turns blue/purple, the milk used has been adulterated.
- To check for detergent, vigorously shake the dissolved sweet and water. If it forms a dense lather then it has been adulterated.
- To check if the silver foil has been adulterated with aluminium, heat up some of the foil on spoon. Pure silver leaves burn away completely leaving glistening balls while aluminium leaves are reduced to grey ash.