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Consumer Now Turn to 'Healthier' Bread Alternatives



No major decline in demand for bread, but sale of multigrain varieties surges.

Sandwiches are a regular breakfast item in young IT professional Vinita Sharma's household. But, a study conducted by a public interest and advocacy organisation indicating our daily bread may have cancer-causing chemicals has prompted Sharma to shift towards healthier versions of the breakfast staple — multigrain and brown bread.

While there has been no major decline in the sale of bread since the study conducted by CSE (Centre for Science and Environment) was made public, retailers suggest that Sharma is not the only one making this shift. There are several others. Bengaluru-based online grocery player ZopNow, which operates in BENGALURU , Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad, has seen a dip in demand for white and wheat bread and, at the same time, a surge in the demand for multigrain breads even though the study found several brown bread and white bread brands

also contain potassium bromate, said to be a potential carcinogen.

"On an average, of the number of breads we sell, 50% is white bread, 35% is wheat and the rest 15% is multigrain," said Mukesh Singh, founder of ZopNow. "But this week, the demand for multigrain bread has accounted for nearly 30% of sales," he said.

Another retailer, SRS Grocery, has witnessed a 5% drop in the white bread sale and an increase in the sale of brown and multigrain bread. "It is too early for us to say if this can majorly be attributed to the consumer concern created on the use of certain additives and their possible ill-effects on health," said Pratik Jindal, MD, e-retail of SRS Grocery.

"Since SRS Grocery mostly offers multigrain and brown bread, we have seen an increase in orders in these two categories and expect this number to rise in the coming days as more and more consumers will now shift to healthier alternatives since of all bakery products, bread consumption is the highest in India".

As much as 84% of 38 commonly available brands of pre-packaged breads tested positive for potassium bromate and potassium iodate, according to the CSE. The two ingredients have been banned by many countries, listing them as "hazardous" for public health, it said. They are not banned in India.

Industry body ASSOCHAM, in a release, said the report by the CSE has caused panic among consumers, resulting in plummeting of sale of bread and bakery products. "If at all there is a problem, it does not lie at the door of the industry.

Already, reports suggest a sharp fall in the sale of morning breads and a sense of panic among homemakers," ASSOCHAM secretary general DS Rawat said. While very few kirana stores observed any change in the selling pattern of breads, some stores noticed drop in the sale of the previous day's stock.

Bread manufacturers have denied drop in sale of any variants and use of harmful chemicals in their products. "Harvest Gold does not use any potassium bromate or potassium iodate at all as in our opinion this is an outdated technology," said a spokesperson of Harvest Gold.

"All Britannia breads products are in 100% compliance with the existing food safety regulations as stipulated by FSSAI," said a spokesperson of the company.
