

The Times of India

Title : Now, startups that hack your snack

Author : Priya Menon

Location :

Article Date : 03/13/2016

Now, startups that hack your snack

Don't want the motichoor that can make you mota, and the kachori that makes you look like one? Now, foodpreneurs are selling nibbles that are low on sin and high on convenience

Priya.Menon@timesgroup.com

A lot can happen over coffee... or chai. As romantic as that sounds, it's hardly good news for your waistline. And in a country where greasy samosas and pakoras are integral to charchas over chai, it has become important to watch what you munch on.

Enter the foodie entrepreneurs with their packets of ragi twisters, jowar puffs, fruit chews, granola crunchers, baked bhakarwadi, health bars and seed mixes. Low on calories and high on convenience, these startups aim to take the junk out of just food.

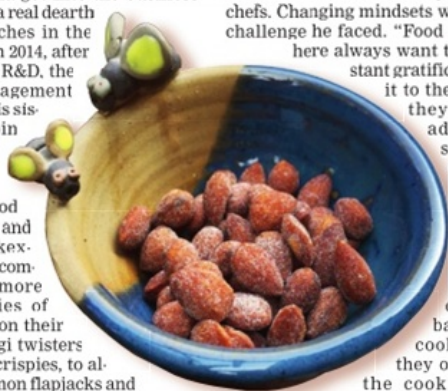
Chennai-based siblings Arun Prakash and Mary Shamla got into the business because they felt a real dearth of healthy munchies in the Indian market. In 2014, after a few months of R&D, the 30-year-old management consultant and his sister decided to join hands with a friend Arul Murugan, who comes from a food tech background, and launched Snackexperts. The online company now has more than 40 varieties of munchies listed on their website, from ragi twisters and kodo millet crispies, to almond and cinnamon flapjacks and oat and nut laddoos.

The demographic they're catering to are young consumers who are grubbing round the clock rather than just sticking to meals. A P&S market research report last year showed that the Indian savoury snack market (along with China) is expected to witness the highest growth among all Asia

Pacific countries: 16.6% during 2015-2020. The global savoury snacks market is expected to reach \$166.6 billion by 2020, growing at 7.1% in the same period.

With so much grazing going on, dietician Dharini Krishnan says it's snacking that trips up even the health-conscious. "You find people who skip breakfast eating kachoris and samosas at 11am or consuming one-and-a-half packets of biscuits."

This is exactly what drove foodie Devang Shah to give up his Boston job and launch Fab Box last year. "While working in Boston, one of my colleagues ordered some snacks which were yummy and when I saw the low calorie content and nutritional value, I was hooked to the idea," says Shah. He moved to Mumbai in 2014 and got in touch with nutritionists, dieticians, and chefs. Changing mindsets was the biggest challenge he faced. "Food professionals here always want to wrap up in instant gratification and give it to the customer, so they don't mind adding excess sugar to your dish," says Shah. Fab Box's 52 snack varieties include nuts, nutri mixes, fruit chews, health bars and even cookies, though they officially state the cookies are 'not healthy' but don't have transfat or cholesterol. While Fab Box works on a pay-as-you-eat model — a one-month box with five snack packs of 150g each cost Rs 999 — others like Snackexperts have a monthly subscription model. Snackexperts' standard box of Rs 699 contains five pouches of five different items of 150gm each.



The demographic they're catering to are young consumers who are grubbing round the clock. A P&S report showed that the Indian savoury snack market will grow 16.6% from 2015 to 2020

Jasmine Kaur started The Green Snack Co last year. Coming from a Punjabi household, Kaur grew up on calorie-rich khana. "A couple of years ago, I decided to take charge of my health, and realized there were not too many healthy snacking options," says Kaur, who then checked out what was available internationally. "The more I read about kale chips, which are really popular in the US, the more I felt it was a good option," says Kaur. "The chips are made by dehydrating them at a very low temperature, at which the nutrients remain intact and enzymes remain alive. Kale is rich in protein, vitamins, calcium, iron and folic acid, and low in calories."

Three months ago, she launched another protein-rich product — puffs with six super grains — quinoa, amaranth, ragi, soya, rice and corn. A 30g pouch of kale chips goes at Rs 200, the quinoa puffs at Rs 80 for 50 grams.

For Sushant Agarwal, the availability

of healthier options has helped change snacking habits. "I follow a strict diet as I am quite heavy and borderline diabetic," says the advertising professional. "But while I watch my regular meals, I often end up eating something fried between meals." He finds the little snack pouches not only convenient to carry to work but also tasty, nutritious and filling.

All the companies say they use no artificial colour or sweeteners, and no harmful chemicals. Fab Box, in fact, says when you order for the first time, the chef will call you and note your taste and health profile and preferences. "So if you are looking for high protein, and are partial to lime flavouring, we recommend roasted lemon soya nuts."

Some stores now have an online presence too offering nutritious snacks. "We launched our website two years ago. Apart from other products, we have more than 50 varieties of healthy snacks," says M Dinesh Kumar, MD of Chennai-based Brown Tree Retail Pvt Ltd. Their fast movers include ragi chips, diet bhel, and jowar puffs.

Corporates, too, are buying into the idea. "We deliver our snacks to 15 companies, as they want to keep their employees fit," says Prakash. At Ramco Systems, a tech firm in Chennai, millet and cereal-based snacks like ragi flakes, oat-and-nut balls and mixed berry packets from Snackexperts were initially provided at every floor between 4 and 5pm. Now, there's a vending machine. "They're made available round the clock, as we believe one cannot help munching at the workplace, and snacking doesn't have a fixed time," says Raghvendra Tripathi, chief performance officer at Ramco.