

8 Health Foods

A variety of foods are distributed as “health foods.” The MHLW takes a wide range of measures, including inspection and guidance to business operators in stages from production to sales, collection of information on adverse health effects and provision of information to consumers.

As the people’s interest in health issues has grown, many kinds of foods have been launched on the market as “health foods.” They include such items that have not been used as foods or beverage before or that are in unique forms.

To ensure the safety of products that are supplied to consumers, the MHLW provides the guidelines which promote to produce these health foods by using the method of Good Manufacturing Practice. The MHLW also collects information on adverse health effects caused by products and provides consumers with information for raising their awareness about health effects.

Health foods

Foods that are sold or used as items useful for maintenance and improvement of health are generally referred to as “health foods.” From the legal perspective, however, there is no explicit definition for the term, except for “food with health claims*” that is defined under the Health Promotion Law.

* The scheme to manage food with health claims has been responsible of the Consumer Affairs Agency since September 2009.

Proper use of health foods

A balanced diet is essential to maintain health. When using “health foods,” therefore, each person needs to carefully choose the appropriate use according to his/her diet.

Those who have health problems or other concerns should consult a medical institution before starting to take the product.

The MHLW provides information on ensuring safety and appropriate use of health foods through its Websites and brochures (see below).



Specific Measures

Specific measures at manufacturing stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Ensuring safety of materials (publication search and toxicology test (when diet experience is not sufficient)) ➢ Ensuring safety by good manufacturing practice (GMP) (manufacturing management and quality management in the whole process) ➢ Ensuring the efficiencies (adaptation of the third-party certification system)
Collection of information on health damage and enforcement of countermeasures	Information is more actively collected, including cases where correlation is unclear. Note: Information regarding the current status of health foods and past health damage cases is provided to physicians and other concerned parties.
Consumer education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Manufactures should label appropriate intake levels and cautions on the products. ➢ A certain level is ensured for the training systems and usage of advisory staff.
Providing information for consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Website on health foods http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/iyaku/syoku-anzen/hokenkinou/ ➢ Brochure “Appropriate Use of Health Foods” http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/iyaku/syoku-anzen/dl/kenkou_shokuhin00.pdf ➢ Website by the National Institute of Health and Nutrition “Information System on Safety and Effectiveness of Health Foods” http://hfnet.nih.go.jp/