

Overview

Report by the Committee for Ensuring the Safety of Health Foods

1. Introduction

With the increase of public interest in health, various kinds of foods are being distributed as health foods, including those that have never been served for eating or drinking and those that are served in a particular form. Under such circumstances, to supply safer products to consumers, the Committee for Ensuring the Safety of Health Foods has examined what measures should be taken mainly concerning ensuring the safety of ingredients, appropriate management of manufacturing processes, collection and analysis of information on health problems, information provision to consumers, and support for consultations.

Note: “Health foods” in this report refer to foods that are sold in general as foods that contribute to the maintenance and improvement of health, excluding foods for specified health uses.

2. Specific measures to ensure the safety of health foods at the manufacturing stage

For foods in tablet or capsule form (“tablet/capsule form foods”), the Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare has already prepared the guidelines for self-inspection for the safety of ingredients of such foods and the guidelines for appropriate manufacturing process management. The following points should be noted to promote safety measures on health foods and have them be understandable for consumers.

(1) Ensuring the safety of ingredients

- Collect information, such as on safety and toxicity through documentary research.
- When the safety of health foods cannot be assured based on a history of consumption as food, conduct toxicity studies using their ingredients.

(2) Ensuring the safety of health foods through manufacturing process management

For tablet/capsule form foods treated with some processes like concentration of ingredients, it is critical to develop a system for manufacturing and quality control—control based on GMP: Good Manufacturing Practice—throughout the whole manufacturing process, from the receipt of ingredients to the packaging and shipment of final products.

(3) Ensuring effectiveness

It is necessary to introduce a third-party certification system, in which a third-party verifies whether the safety mentioned in above (1) and (2) is ensured. This enables consumers to select safer products. In addition, this can lead to encourage manufacturers to take adequate measures to improve the safety.

Details of the third-party certification system

- Certification bodies are not designated based on the laws and regulations. The system is such that a certification council—consisting of academic experts, consumers, and manufacturers—designates certification bodies, establishes standards for certification, and guides and supervises the bodies.
- At establishing and operating the certification council, administrative authorities should cooperate with each other, such as by information exchange.
- The logo indicating that the product is certified should be unified.

3. Enhance the system to collect and handle information on health problems

Information collection concerning health problems is significant to prevent further occurrences and recurrence of the health problems. It is desirable to proactively collect information, even in cases where the causal relationship between the health foods and the health problems is not clear and where the degree of the problem is not severe.

- The administrative agencies concerned should proactively provide information, such as on the current situation of health foods and cases of health problems in the past, to the doctors and other public health experts.
- Through interagency cooperation, food administrative agencies should appropriately collect information on health problems that consumer administrative agencies have and should analyze cases of problems.
- Manufacturers should promote post-marketing research.

4. Information dissemination and awareness-raising to consumers

Today, consumers are flooded with misinformation on health foods and some consumers have excessive expectation for health foods. To prevent the occurrence of health problems, it is very important to raise public awareness and disseminate correct information on the safety of health foods and basic knowledge on them.

- Manufacturers should provide label information on the adequate intake and

warnings.

- Relevant parties should work together to keep the quality of training programs for advisers and of their activities at a certain level.