The regulator is also trying to rope in restaurants to offer healthier food choices to patrons. Restaurants may be required to list ingredients used and calorie counts. “It is voluntary now, but is increasingly becoming a global practice,” said Agarwal. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India is working with the FSSAI on this initiative.

The FSSAI is sending a team to train staff at 20 temples in Tamil Nadu that offer food and drinks to devotees. The regulator will pursue such training programmes across the country.
New Delhi: India’s food regulator wants restaurants to declare the calorific and nutritive value of the food they serve in an effort aimed at making consumers aware of what they eat.

“Declaring details of calorie intake and nutrition information ensures that consumers are informed. These things are already part of labelling norms for packaged food,” said Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

But Agarwal doesn’t want to make this mandatory—at least, not yet.

“To start with, let the big ones come forward and do this voluntarily.”

Some fine-dining restaurants, especially those at five-star hotels, have separate menus for low-calorie food and also offer sugar-free options on demand. But they do not declare calorific and nutrition details.

The Indian food regulator’s move is probably inspired by the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), which in December 2014 notified rules for the so-called Nutrition Labelling of Standard Menu Items in Restaurants and Similar Retail Food Establishments. By 5 May 2017, some categories of restaurants in the US will have to comply with these.

FSSAI is likely to follow the USFDA standards, when it decides to notify rules, although there is no plan to do this immediately.

“We are working with FSSAI and disclosing information on nutrition and calorie intake will not be an issue,” said a spokesperson for the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Northern India that has 1,700 members across nine states.