

A Study on The Benefits of Convenience Foods To Non-Working Women

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Abstract

The last decade and half has seen a remarkable growth in the manufacture of convenience food industry in India and the non-working women are not left far behind in selecting such products for their family. She always ponders about the right kind of preparations that she needs to make for her family be it any time or any meal of the day. In this process she has to keep take the choices of her family members into account and try to strike a right equilibrium in her food preparation.

This study aims at finding out about the use of convenience food by non-working women and of their need to choose, the type of convenience food they generally prefer and what benefits they see by using such a convenient products in their home. The primary data for this study has been collected through questionnaire from non-working women from different areas in Pune city and the same has been presented in graphical form for clear understanding while the secondary data has been collected through literature review of various research papers, articles and books.

The non-working women are the forerunners to try out these convenience foods in their kitchens. This study has its focus to understand the benefits these working women would obtain through utilization of convenience foods

Keywords: Convenience Food, Processed Food, Non-Working Women

Introduction

The term “convenience food” conjures up images of

overly processed foods that are high in fat, sugar, and sodium and low in fiber and other nutrients. Convenience food often connotes a lack of effort or concern, whether by choice or necessity. Traditionally, convenience foods have not been the most healthful choices and often have been much costlier than home-cooked food. The last decade and half has seen a remarkable growth in the manufacture of convenience food industry in India and the non-working women are not left far behind in selecting such products for their family.

The non-working women always ponder about the right kind of preparations that she needs to make for her family be it any time or any meal of the day. In this process she has to keep take the choices of her family members into account and try to strike a right equilibrium in her food preparation. She understands her family’s likes and dislikes; she has the perfect knack or the perfect blend of ingredients into her preparation. She will spend her time in the kitchen cutting, grinding, mixing and blending to prepare the best of her preparations for her family. This has been her domain for years and she has settled a routine for herself in this domain of hers. Nothing in the world can beat her taste! It wouldn’t be wrong to say that every Indian knows the best food prepared is said as “ma ke haath ka” –(prepared by mother’s hands).

Over the years processed food has become one of the fastest growing industries in world and Indian market is not far behind. The market for processed foods is still in the early stages in a developing economy like India but surely has a big impact to play in our daily diets. Food with convenience in cooking and purchase are finding entry into the Indian households. Of course taste habits, processed foods; new introductory products are no

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exception to this. The convenience food industries with the state of the art technology have been very successful in penetrating the local household in way of successful marketing and advertising of their products. These convenience foods have started replacing fresh and healthy food from consumers' diet with processed food.

Food diversity in India is an embedded characteristic of India's diverse culture consisting of different regions and states within. Traditionally, Indians like to have home-cooked food – a concept supported religiously as well as individually. However, with times due to increasing awareness and influence of western culture, there is a visible shift in food consumption patterns among urban Indian families. It all started in the early 1990's when families started exploring outside food in the restaurants and moved on to accepting a wide variety of delicacies from world-over. Fast food is one of the major examples which gained acceptance of Indian palate after the multinational fastfood players adapted the basic Indian food requirements viz. vegetarian meals and selected non-vegetarian options excluding beef and pork totally from their menu.

The non-working women often find convenience food to be a costly affair as compared to the food she prepares at home. She does find many products which are very similar to preparation that she would prepare at home. She is able to easily compare the costs that she incurs for her own preparation and for the similar product available in the market. At the same time non-working women do not hesitate to try out a new product for her family just for a change in her daily routine or her family liking.

Keeping in view the non-working women and changing preferences towards convenience foods, this study has its focus to understand the benefits these non-working women would obtain through utilization of convenience foods.

Definition

Convenience food: Convenience food, or tertiary processed food, is commercially prepared food designed for ease of consumption. (Source: www.google.com)

Processed food: Processed foods have been altered from their natural state for safety reasons and for convenience. (Source: www.answers.yahoo.com)

Packaged food: Basically packaged food is food that can be shipped somewhere. And the reason that they are packaged is because so they can be safe and keep out germs. (Source: www.wikianswers.com)

Review of Literature

Alan Warde (1999) "*Convenience food: space and timing*", emphasizes that many people are constrained to eat what they call convenience foods as a provisional response to intransigent problems of scheduling everyday life. A distinction is drawn between modern and hypermodern forms of convenience, the first directed towards labour saving or time compression, the second to time-shifting. It is maintained that convenience food is as much a hypermodern response to de-reutilization as it is a modern search for the reduction of toil. Convenience food is required because people are too often in the wrong place; the impulse to time-shifting arises from the compulsion to plan ever more complex time-space paths in everyday life. The problem of timing supersedes the problem of shortage of time.

Anita Goyal and N P Singh (2007) in their research paper "*Consumer perception about fast food in India: an exploratory study*" indicate that the young Indian consumer has passion for visiting fast food outlets for fun and change but home food is their first choice. They feel homemade food is much better than food served at fast food outlets. They have the highest value for taste and quality (nutritional values) followed by ambience and hygiene.

Bernard Cova, Stefano Pace, (2006) "*Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case "my Nutella The Community"*", states that The virtual community that gathers around a convenience product brand shows a new form of sociality and customer empowerment: it is not based on interaction between peers, but more on personal self-exhibition in front of other consumers through the marks and rituals linked to the brand. The company should play the role of non-intrusive enabler of these personal expressions, reducing its control over the brand's meanings.

Dixon, Hinde, and Banwell, (2006) "*Obesity, convenience and "phood"*" have emphasized that in Australia the growing consumption of convenience foods is contributing to upward trends in overweight. It is argued that the functional food sector is well placed in a context where

consumers are being encouraged to embrace convenient food solutions, while also being concerned about the nutritional qualities of foods.

Gray, Armstrong, and Farley, (2003) “*Opportunities and constraints in the functional food market*” review that the main food choice trends driving consumer demand for functional foods and the constraints limiting market development. Considers previous research activity in the functional food arena and subsequently identifies paramount research priorities that may facilitate the development of products that will help satisfy consumer demands for convenience, health and sensory pleasure.

Jabir A, Sanjeev K and Janakiraman M (2010) in their study “*Buying behaviour of consumers for food products in an emerging economy*” emphasize the preferences of the consumers clearly indicate their priority for cleanliness/freshness of food products followed by price, quality, variety, packaging, and non-seasonal availability. The consumers’ preference of marketplace largely depends on the convenience in purchasing at the marketplace along with the availability of additional services, attraction for children, basic amenities and affordability.

Janaína Costa, Rafael Claro, Ana Paula, Renata Levy (2013) “*Food Purchasing Sites: Repercussions For Healthy Eating*” have stresses that changes in the food system are associated with the increase in consumption of foods with low nutritional value in recent decades. Data on food purchasing for household consumption, collected from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics)

Household Budget Survey (HBS) in 2002-3, were used to describe the contribution of food purchasing sites (FPS) to the diet of Brazilian families. All the 241 distinct FPS mentioned in the HBS were grouped into ten categories, according to the nature of the products available. Food acquisitions were organized into seven groups. Supermarkets and hypermarkets accounted for 49% of the acquisitions and were the main source of six out of the seven food groups. Street markets and greengroceries stood out in the acquisitions of fruits and vegetables, accounting for 39% of this market. The large contribution of supermarkets and hypermarkets to the diet shows the need for healthy eating promotion policies aiming at these locations.

Joglekar A and Kundle S (2013) “*Consumer awareness about convenience food among working and nonworking women*” have opined that Convenience food is the result of modern technological advances in the field of food processing, preservation techniques and the invention of various newer food additives. Convenience foods minimise the working time but it doesn’t save us from consuming high preservatives, extra sodium and hydrogenated fats

Kara, Kaynak and Kucukemiroglu (1997) state in their study “*Marketing strategies for fast-food restaurants: a customer view*” that; in recent years, a major food consumption trend in the USA and Canada is that more people are eating more meals outside their homes. It is predicted that this trend will accelerate in the future. As a result, fast-food markets will offer greater growth opportunities for marketers.

According to Ritu Anand (2011), “*A study of determinants impacting consumers food choice with reference to the fast food consumption in India*”, signifies the key determinants impacting consumers food choice are passion for eating out, socialize, ambience and taste for school and college goers and convenience for dual-income families in urban India. Findings indicate that fast food companies can no longer rely on convenience as USP in India, unless the implications of same on consumer’s health is given equal importance in the years to come.

Sunder S and Kiran S (2015) in their research paper “*A Study On The Benefits of Convenience Foods To Working Women*” have emphasized that the working women are slowly adapting to concept of the use of convenience foods as they have realized various factors that are enabling them to save time by reducing preparation time, bringing in variety in preparations and also are able to use it during emergency situations.

Tiwari P and Verma H (2008) in their research paper “*Consumer Perception About Fast Food in India: An Empirical Study of Dehradun City*” point out that fast food is one of the world’s fastest growing food types. It now accounts for roughly half of all restaurant revenues in the developed countries, where it continues to expand. However, some of the most rapid growth is occurring in the developing world; where it is radically changing the way people eat. People buy fast food because it is cheap, easy to prepare, and heavily promoted.

According to the article featured on *www.fnbnews.com*, 11th October 2011 there has been a major shift in food habits in the metropolitan cities, about 86% of households prefer to have instant food due to steep rise in dual income level and standard of living, convenience, and influence of western countries, according to a survey undertaken by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham).

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the factors influencing the use of convenience foods by non-working women
2. To identify the various categories of convenience-foods available for non-working women
3. To check the preference of various categories of convenience foods by non-working women
4. To explore the benefits of convenience foods for non-working women

Research Methodology

Data collection: The primary data required for the research was collected using the following techniques:

Personal interviews: The researcher conducted personal interview with non-working women.

Questionnaire: A questionnaire bearing straight forward and relevant questions was drafted and handed over to the sample to obtain their responses.

Sample technique: The population being “non-working women”, this study was conducted on more than 100 non-working women between the age group of above 25 to 55 years.

All the samples were selected randomly from the various areas of Pune city.

Apart from the above mentioned tools the relevant secondary data for the research was collected from journals, books and internet.

Observations and Discussions

Factors Influencing the Choice of Convenience Food Non-working women tends to look for options to cook food during her day to day routine. She would play multiple roles like in her family which keeps her thinking

cap on her head throughout the day. She does have a fixed working time as a working woman. She adjusts her routine on day to day basis to ensure adequate time is available to do all the processes involved in the process of cooking which would involve various stages i.e. right from going to the market, pre-processing, processing, cooking, cleaning/clearing and serving of food. She seldom would look for ways in which she can reduce her cooking time be it for breakfast, lunch or dinner. She might of course not get certain ingredients in the market or at the place where she lives which might lead her to very easily pick up such ingredient that might be available somewhere distant from her place of living.

A non-working woman constantly ensures that a variety of ingredients are used in the preparation of her daily meals. This variety also ensures different tastes, textures and also nutritional benefits that go into the thought process while preparing food. She does not have elaborate plans made for days together; she might just pick up fresh ingredients during the day for her preparations. She is always prepared for situations that she might come across when she has to prepare food for surprise guests or additional people for meals; hence she keeps some convenience stuff handy at home for such situations. Exchange of recipes and ideas of new preparation with other women also helps her to keep up to the ever demanding kids of the house. A non-working woman is not only stuck with preparation of food with fresh ingredients; she might also want to experiment on certain new preparations that is available in the market to appease her family or one could also consider that she might be completely lost with what recipe must she follow for preparing something new.

Non-working women have started foraging into the world of convenience foods. They are looking into saving the first few steps of kitchen work rather than the later stage of cooking process. They are not worried of the kitchen mess that occurs while they prepare their meals nor do they feel the necessity of convenience food to prepare a variety in their meal. It was observed that non-working women who have children in their houses tend to lean more towards purchase of convenience foods.

Preference of Convenience Food

Convenience food is available in the market for a variety of products in a variety of forms and packaging. In the last decade one has seen a multiple growth in the convenience

food sector. Convenience food manufacturers are also investing in a lot of advertising for their products and targeting various audiences. The preference of convenience food is determined with most commonly available and purchased convenience products. The following list would indicate the various categories of convenience food that a non-working woman generally would purchase from the store:-

- Frozen – Non vegetarian products (chicken, fish, etc)
- Frozen – Vegetarian products (paneer, vegetables, etc)
- Frozen – Snack products (pizza, samosa, French fries, smily, etc)
- Ready to serve products – (dal makhni, paneer makhni, palak paneer, etc)
- Fresh cut vegetables – (carrot, cauliflower, etc.)
- Pre-processed products – (soups, gravy mixes, rawaidli mix, etc)
- Ready to eat snacks – (chips, farsan, sev, biscuits, etc)
- Canned products – (coconut milk, fruits, milkmaid, etc)
- Bottled products – (jams, sauces, syrups, mayonnaise, spreads, etc)
- Refrigerated products – (tofu, paneer, etc)

The above mentioned list was utilized into the questionnaire to obtain the preferences of working woman on their choice of categories during their purchases.

Benefits of Convenience Food

Time Saving: Convenience food helps reduce the time required for pre-preparation and to some extent even cooking time required. Hence, significant time can be saved where preparation from scratch for any meal can be avoided.

Variety: Due to the various techniques used in the convenience food manufacturing process one is able to get a lot of variety in the market. In fact the amount of variety available in the stores today does put a working woman in a fix on the choice that she needs to make. Another point to be noticed is that this variety remains constant in the market and does not go off shelf citing seasonal reasons like the fresh fruits and vegetables do.

Healthy: One can read the contents and detailing on the packaging of the convenience product and decide

whether health aspects are preferred or not.

Convenience: these products are convenient to carry, stack and store them since their packaging are well planned considering various factors like consistency, texture, size and fragility.

Shelf Life: Most convenience foods have a longer shelf life due to additives and the same is also mentioned on the package hence the user is well informed of its usage period.

Storage: Storage of convenience foods is easy as they can be stacked up anywhere and can also help better utilization of the space available. Regeneration is also faster and better.

Labour Saving: Convenience food helps saving labour in the terms of going to market for purchase, pre-cleaning, pre-preparation and post preparation cleaning.

Food Safety: The new techniques used in the manufacturing and packaging of convenience like aseptic canning, rapid freezing, various methods of eradicating bacteria reduce its presence and also reduce spoilage of food to a great extent if stored properly. **Recipe Knowledge:** Many a time the working woman does have requests from her own home or she herself wants to try preparing something of which recipe might not be known to her. Hence she looks out for such products for which she need not bother to know how to prepare it rather she would use the convenience of such available products.

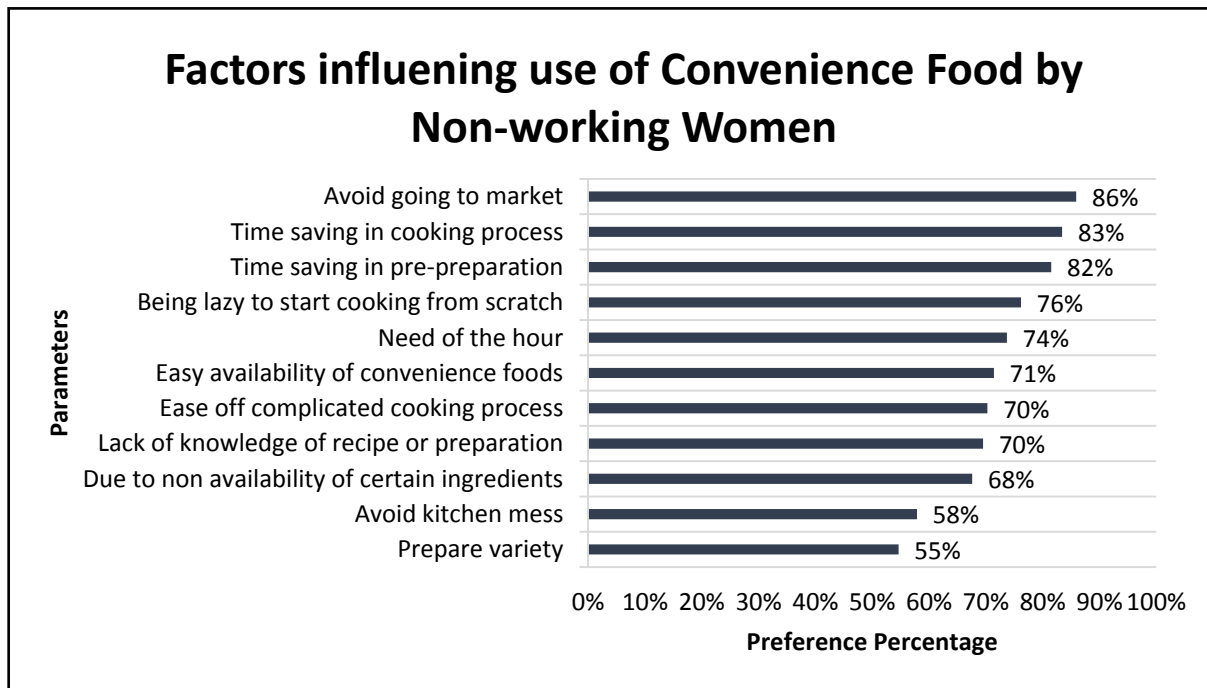
Availability: Certain fresh products might not be available throughout the year due to their seasonal availability whereas convenience products are manufactured using stringent quality standards hence their availability besides being consistent also has consistent taste, texture and taste.

Findings

Analysis of data is done from results obtained from more than 100 non-working women from various areas of Pune city. The result obtained from this is represented graphically.

Figure 1 shows the various factors that influence a non-working woman to purchase convenience food. It can be observed that avoiding going to the market is the major influencing factor followed by time saving in cooking and

Figure 1: Factors Influencing use of Convenience Food by Non-working Women



pre-preparation processes. Factors like preparing variety and avoiding kitchen mess is pretty low.

Figure 2 indicates that non-working women prefer to buy fresh cut vegetables followed by ready to serve foods and ready to eat snacks. Their choice for frozen vegetarian and frozen snack products is pretty low.

Figure 2: Convenience Foods Preferred by Non-working Women

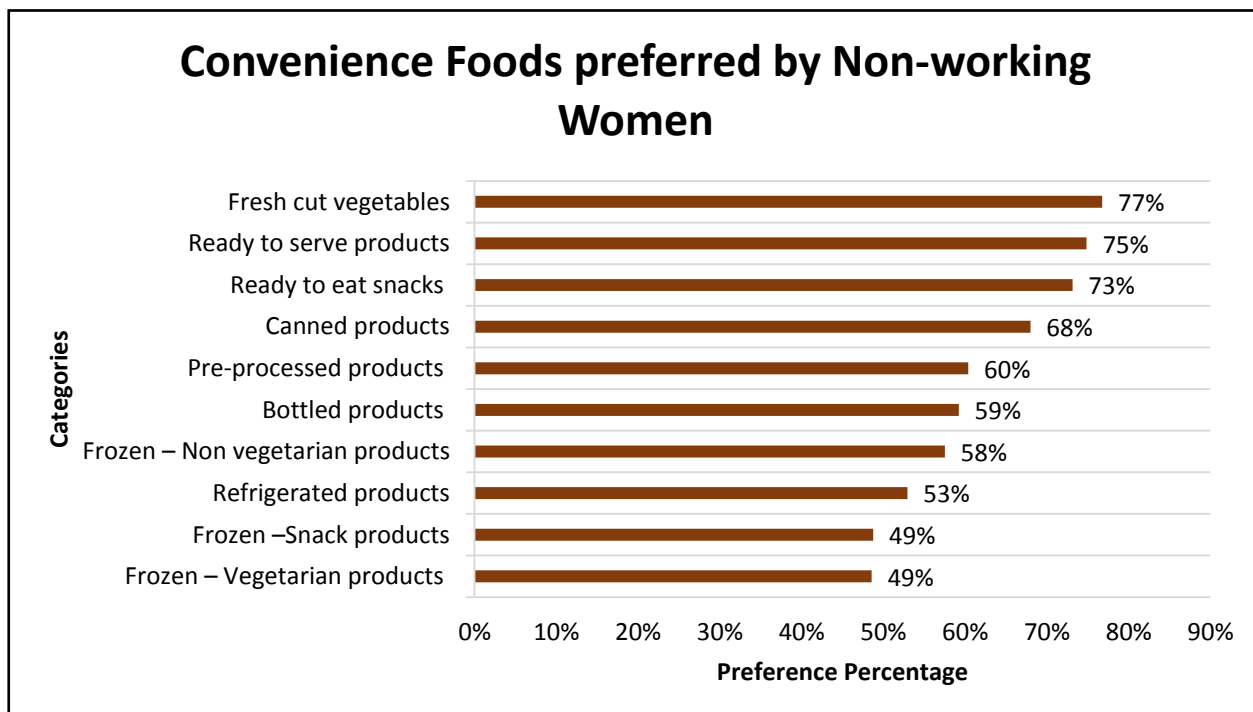


Figure 3: Benefits of Convenience Food for Non-working Women

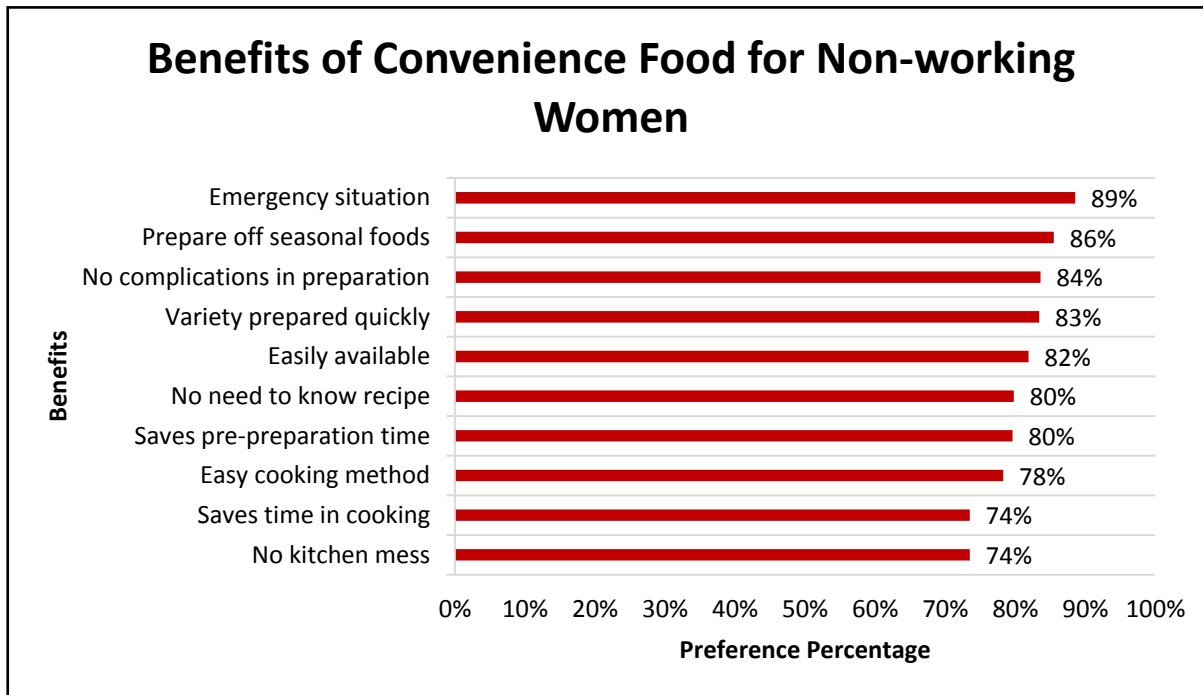


Figure 3 shows what benefits the working women are able to obtain by using convenience foods. For emergency situation and preparing off seasonal food are seen to be the most beneficial for non-working women.

Recommendations and Suggestion

1. It is suggested that whenever a non-working woman decides to purchase a convenience food she must try to read and understand the health benefits she might be obtaining by the use of that particular convenience product.
2. A non-working woman must also observe the storage factor of that particular convenience food as each convenience food has a different storage criteria or pre-requisites.
3. The study is conducted in the current scenario and the opinions, perception and expectations of the respondents may differ with time and does not differentiate respondents on basis of their demographic factors which may have an influence of their perception thereby identifying scope for further research.

Conclusion

There has been a tremendous growth of the convenience food industry in India in the last decade. Many minor and major companies have opened door to consumers to try out their convenience product. A lot of investment is done by these manufacturing companies in advertising their products through different media to attract more consumers. They have been successful in entering into urban houses to a great extent. Convenience food is surely gaining popularity amongst all ages today. The non-working women surely are looking into this segment for their homes. They are very careful in choosing the right product for their family.

They are aware of the difference between their preparations and similar convenience foods available in the market and also the cost factor for the same. They ensure that they are the masterminds of variety and get the correct ingredients in their preparations. They also try to make different preparations and try out new recipes rather than opening a pack of convenient food. Their preference in processed foods is stuck with pre cut vegetables, ready to serve products or snacks rather than the frozen products. Non-working women are not bothered with the kitchen mess that happens during cooking nor do they think much

on saving cooking time or find an easy way out. It is also noted that the non-working women have a tendency to use convenience food during situations when a quick meal needs to be prepared.

It is very ideal that working women will surely tend to look upon such products which will help her to save time of her cooking process in some way or the other. Today's working women do not hesitate to go out to try a new convenient product that may be available in the market. They are well versed with what are the new convenient products that are available in the store nearby. Convenience food is available in a variety of forms which may include products like pre-cut vegetables, bottled and canned products, frozen meat and snacks, ready to cook or ready to serve foods and many more. These products are well designed considering the requirement of the consumer. They are also made safe for consumption and also hold a good shelf life. Their storage conditions are also mentioned to ensure proper utilization of product in case of it not being utilized completely. The working women are adapting to use of convenience foods as they are realizing that they are able to save time by reducing preparation time and also are able to include some variety into their preparations.

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