



Easy to open packaging

A consumer's guide to the European
technical specification for packaging

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Nearly half of over-65s, and one in six people under 40, find it hard to open everyday items, such as plastic milk bottles or jars.

With an ageing population and more people living independently into old age, it's more important than ever that packaging is easy to open for everyone, including older people who tend to have reduced hand strength.

The technical specification (TS) described in this leaflet helps manufacturers design packaging that all consumers – whatever their age or strength – can open with ease.

CEN TS 15945 – the basics

- CEN TS 15945, the European Technical Specification for ease of opening, sets out a method for testing how easy a pack is to open
- The test can be used for different types of packaging, including jars, bottles, cartons, boxes and cans
- The test method involves asking a group of older people to open the packaging and reach the contents
- The TS is voluntary and can be used by anyone with an interest in accessible packaging, including manufacturers, retailers and consumer groups

CEN TS 15945 – the details

The TS helps manufacturers ensure that every type of package – from vacuum-packed bacon to self-assembly wardrobes – is fit for its purpose. The aim is to balance security of contents with ease of use, so that products are well protected but also easily accessible.

The best way to find out whether packaging is easy to open is to ask real people to use it. This is why the specification recommends testing packaging with a group of consumers, as described below.

The consumer panel

- The testing panel should consist of up to 100 people aged between 65 and 80. Hand strength tends to reduce as we get older so, if this group of people can open the items with ease, the vast majority of the population will also be able to do so
- 70% of panel members should be female to reflect the fact that women generally have a weaker grip than men



The test

The test evaluates the complete experience of using the packaging, as follows:

- **Effectiveness** – Users are given five minutes to read the opening instructions and open an unfamiliar package
- **Efficiency** – Once they are familiar with the pack, users are given one minute to open a second sample of the pack
- **Satisfaction** – Users are then asked to take out some of the contents and reclose the pack where applicable. Each user records their satisfaction with the process, stating how easy they found the task and whether it was uncomfortable or problematic

The results

- There is no pass or fail mark but packaging is considered easy to open if the large majority of testers can open it efficiently and effectively and were satisfied with the process
- Manufacturers can use the test results to improve packaging and develop more accessible products

Future developments

- Over the next few years, the TS will be tried out and possibly modified and expanded, and is likely to be adopted as a British Standard in 2014
- During this time, mechanical tests will be developed to be used alongside the consumer test. These will measure things such as the strength of packaging and the force needed to open a pack
- In the meantime, manufacturers are being encouraged to develop their own mechanical tests
- Future versions of the TS are likely to address problems that people with visual or cognitive problems might have with packaging

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Frequently asked questions

Q. What is BSI?

A. BSI is the UK National Standards Body which has been developing standards for more than 100 years to make products and services safer for consumers. Standards set out good practice and guidelines for organizations to follow.

Q. Who developed the ease of opening TS?

A. It was drawn up by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), a non-governmental organization that develops standards to support business and consumers in Europe. BSI is a member of CEN.

Q. What's the difference between a TS and a British Standard?

A. A TS works just like a standard but has only a three-year life, during which time users have the chance to try it out and suggest amendments. In 2014, at the end of the three years, it's likely to be adopted as a British Standard. Like most standards, the TS is voluntary, so you can feel confident that those organizations that choose to use it take the needs of consumers seriously.

Q. Does the TS cover all types of packaging?

A. It doesn't cover packaging for large, heavy items such as washing machines or dishwashers. And it applies only to packaging that doesn't require a separate tool to open it. So, for example, it could be used to assess screw top bottles or tins with ring pulls but not for bottles with corks, or tins that need a tin opener.

Q. What about safety? Do easier to open packs make it easier for children to open hazardous products?

A. No. The existing safety regulations will continue to apply to packaging of dangerous goods, medicines and medical devices. These regulations will take precedence over ease of opening.

Q. Where can I find a copy of the full TS?

A. Your local public library may be able to help you access a reference copy, or you can buy a copy from BSI at shop.bsigroup.com

Useful information

AgeUK

0800 169 6565

www.ageuk.org.uk

British Standards (BSI)

020 8996 9001

www.bsigroup.com

European Committee for Standardization (CEN)

www.cen.eu

Ricability

(consumer testing for older and disabled people)

020 7427 2460

www.ricability.org.uk

The BSI logo consists of the lowercase letters 'bsi' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A small red dot is positioned to the right of the letter 'i'.

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