Kosher Foods

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Kosher Foods

Some religions specify dietary rules to follow. One of the most confusing sets of guidelines applies to kosher foods. Kosher foods are items approved by kashrut, the body of Jewish law that supplies the guidelines for food preparation. Not all Jews follow these guidelines, but if they do, they are said to “keep kosher.”

Jewish dietary laws maintain certain rules for preparing foods that are not common in modern food preparation. These laws originated from the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. The following information is an overview of Jewish dietary laws.

Meats
Land animals that have cloven hooves and chew their cud may be eaten. Any land animal that does not have both of those qualities is forbidden. Milk and other products from forbidden animals are also forbidden.

- **Kosher:** Cows, goats, sheep, bison, deer
- **Non-kosher:** Pigs, camels, rabbits, rodents, reptiles, insects, camel’s milk

Seafood
Seafood that has both fins and scales may be eaten. Shellfish are forbidden.

- **Kosher:** Carp, salmon, whitefish, tuna
- **Non-kosher:** Catfish, swordfish, crab, lobster, shrimp, oysters

Poultry
Birds of prey and scavengers are forbidden. Other birds are permitted.

- **Kosher:** Chicken, turkey, duck, goose
- **Non-kosher:** Ostrich, hawk, owl, stork

Dairy
Dairy cannot be eaten at the same time as meat or poultry, but it can be eaten with fish. Even a very small quantity of dairy (or meat) in something makes it entirely dairy (or meat) for kosher purposes. Three to six hours must elapse between eating dairy and meat.

- **Kosher:** Cream cheese with lox, milk with eggs
- **Non-kosher:** Cheeseburger, milk with chicken

Grape Products
Because wine and grape juice are used for religious purposes, grape-derived products must be made following strict guidelines that cover growth, harvest and production, and they must be made by Jews.

- **Kosher:** Kosher grape juice, kosher wine, whole grapes
- **Non-kosher:** Fruit drinks containing non-kosher grape juice, products sweetened with non-kosher grape juice

Slaughtering
Kosher meats and poultry must be slaughtered by a butcher who is well educated in kashrut (a shochet). A specific method is used for slaughtering (shechitah). The method involves slitting the animal’s throat with a sharp knife. The animal then bleeds out quickly, resulting in a fast death that is considered the most humane. All blood, sciatic nerves and surrounding blood vessels, and fat around the vital organs (chelev fat) must be removed before consumption. Certain body parts are not allowed for consumption despite the animal source being kosher.

Utensils
Utensils must also be kosher. Each utensil or piece of cookware is reserved for a specific type of food. Utensils, cookware, plates, flatware, dishwashers, dishwasher, and towels that were previously used for a non-kosher food item may not be used for a kosher food item. Cooks must also maintain separate cookware and utensils for dairy and meat.

Regulation
Foods may not be advertised as kosher unless they meet the requirements. Jewish individuals rely on rabbinical supervision to make sure that foods are prepared according to kashrut. As more and more products are
developed for the marketplace some companies are developing their own criteria for kosher food. Using the older certifying agencies listed below will help ensure correct interpretation.

Symbols
The following symbols indicate widely accepted kosher certifications commonly found in the United States. The symbols are usually found on the label near the product name, and occasionally near the list of ingredients.

- The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU)
  11 Broadway, New York, NY 10004

- The Organized Kashrus Laboratories (O/K)
  391 Troy Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

- Star-K Kosher Certification (chalav Yisrael) & Star-D Certification (non-chalav Yisrael)
  122 Slade Ave. #300, Baltimore, MD 21208

- Kof-K Kosher Supervision
  201 The Plaza, Teaneck, NJ 07666

Symbols used with permission.

Although some religions allow dietary interpretation, those who choose to keep kosher follow a stringent set of guidelines.

This publication covers the basics of keeping kosher and has been reviewed by a rabbi. For more in-depth information, please visit one of the websites listed below.

References


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