

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, dishwater, 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

American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (2013). Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Laws. Retrieved February 8, 2013, from <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/kashrut.html>.

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