

Esther Altmann, Ph.D.
40 East 88th Street
New York, NY 10128
212-426-8030
ealtmann@nyc.rr.com

KOSHER 101: THE BASIC LAWS

KEY CONCEPTS OF KASHRUT

Kashrut (the Hebrew word for kosher) refers to the Jewish laws that deal with what foods *can and cannot be eaten and how those foods must be prepared*.

The word comes from the Hebrew root that means proper or correct.

Foods are not blessed by rabbis to make them kosher. Rather, someone (a mashgeach) supervises the production of processed foods, meat, and poultry to make sure that all the laws of kashrut have been followed. If all the ingredients and procedures meet the rules of kashrut, then the food is certified kosher.

In Jewish law there is no such thing as “kosher-style.” Kosher is not a style of cooking but rather a set of standards that need to be followed in order for food to be certified kosher.

Jews observe the laws of kashrut because they are commandments in the Torah (Old Testament). Rabbis have tried to make these laws meaningful and have developed interesting explanations about why they exist, though the Torah does not specify reasons for their observance.

Some interesting explanations that have been proposed in rabbinic literature include:

- The simple act of eating is elevated into a religious ritual.
- The dinner table is compared to the altar in the temple.
- Ritualizing the slaughter of animals reflects the reverence for animal life.
- Rules about what you can eat and not eat are a reminder to distinguish between sacred and profane, between right and wrong, or between good and evil.
- There are potential health benefits from some of the Kashrut laws.

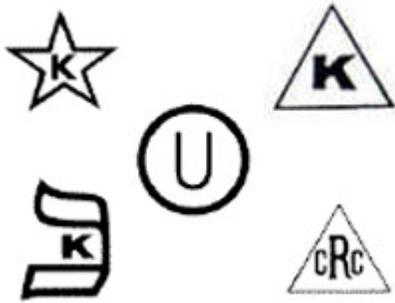
GENERAL RULES OF KASHRUT

- Certain animals are forbidden from being eaten at all. The most common ones include any food product derived from a pig and all shellfish.
- Of the animals that may be eaten, fowl and meat must only be from animals that were slaughtered according to Jewish law.
- All fruits and vegetables are permitted but need to be inspected for bugs. (This is mostly a concern about certain vegetables like broccoli or berries such as strawberries.)
- Dairy and meat cannot be eaten together. Poultry is considered to be meat.
- Grains, eggs, fruits, vegetables and fish are called PAREVE which means that they are neutral, neither meat nor dairy, and can be eaten with either food groups.
- Fish cannot be eaten on the same plate as meat but can be eaten either before or after.
- There is a waiting time between eating meat and then eating dairy food. The Orthodox standard is **six hours** between eating meat and dairy. So if one has a meat sandwich at 1 p.m., you could not eat a dairy dinner or have a dairy snack until 7 p.m.

This law is more custom based and depends on family of origin. Some Modern Orthodox individuals wait 3 hours. Individuals of Dutch ancestry only wait one hour.

- There is only a short waiting time of ½ hour between eating meat after eating a dairy food. [Some people will wait 6 hours after eating certain hard cheeses.]
- Utensils used for meat and dairy always need to be separated. This means that if a meat spoon was used to stir a creamed soup, that spoon is no longer considered to be a kosher utensil. There are methods to remedy this and make the utensil kosher once again.
- Similarly, utensils that have come into contact with non-kosher food may not be used with kosher food. Therefore all utensils, pots, pans, toasters, microwave oven, etc. that will be used for kosher food needs to remain separate and cannot be used for nonkosher foods as well.

KOSHER CERTIFICATION



These are some of the acceptable kosher symbols. The most common one and most widely accepted is the **OU** which is the certification from the Orthodox Union of Rabbis based in New York. The other certifications are from rabbinical supervisions in other cities.

Most Orthodox individuals will accept most of these certifications. There will always be some individuals who will reject a particular certification.

Cholov Isroel - This is the term for “kosher milk” though the Orthodox Union (OU) considers milk produced in the United States to be kosher without certification. This standard is usually held only by ultra orthodox individuals in certain communities.

“**D**” - alongside a kosher label means that it is a product that may contain dairy ingredients.

“**Pareve**” – alongside a kosher label means that the food is pareve and can be eaten with dairy or meat.

“**P**” – means that the food is kosher for Passover and can be eaten during Passover and all year around.

KOSHER TERMS and PRACTICES

Halachah is the Hebrew word for Jewish law.

Kosher means fit for ritual use or proper for eating.

Treif is the Yiddish word for not kosher.

Mashgiach is the person who supervises the production of kosher food or the slaughtering of animals according to Jewish law.

Brachah means a blessing. Blessings are said both before and after meals. Some blessings are short and recited before eating a particular food such as an apple. There are different blessing for different food groups.

Ritual Hand Washing is a practice of washing hands and reciting a blessing before a meal in which bread is eaten.

Birkat Hamazon means Grace after Meals.

This is a somewhat lengthy blessing which is recited after a meal in which bread has been eaten. If bread was not eaten during the meal, a shorter blessing can be recited. Sometimes individuals avoid eating bread at a meal so that they do not have to wash their hands before eating and recite the Birkat Hamazon afterwards. This practice may interact with a desire to avoid carbohydrates in eating disordered individuals.

Pareve refers to neither dairy nor meat foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains and fish.

Dairy refers to milk products or any food items that has an ingredient derived from a dairy product. **Milchig** is the Yiddish word for dairy.

Meat includes beef, poultry or veal or any food that has an ingredient that is derived from a meat product. Foods that are pareve but cooked in a meat pot are also considered to be meat. **Fleishig** is the Yiddish word for meat.