Kosher Guide for Colleagues: About the Jewish Dietary Laws

Introduction

***Kashrut** is the set of ***Kosher Dietary Laws** followed by observant Jews. These laws include a collection of mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah (Pentateuch), rabbinic teachings of the Talmud and commentators, and communal customs. The word "kosher" actually means "fit" or appropriate.

A basic understanding of how Kashrut is observed can be very helpful when buying or ordering food for clients or colleagues. If your office or program has occasion to buy food for clients or colleagues who "keep kosher," that is, who follow the Jewish dietary laws, this guide may be a useful reference.

Keeping the client/colleague's needs in mind

It is tempting to feel that if food that one wishes to offer to clients/colleagues is kosher (the products themselves are under broadly accepted kosher supervision, the serving utensils and dishes are new paper or plastic ones, and no cooking or reheating is needed), then one has addressed the needs of one's clients or colleagues. As described below, there are many special needs, particularly related to Dairy products and Meat products.

While the essential elements of Kashrut (Kosher practice) are the universal heritage of observant Jews, there are subtle differences in specific application between different groups and communities. As a result, it can feel difficult to find foods that are universally consumed by all kosher-observant Jews.

- Keep it simple: When possible, **keep it *pareve** and plant based!
- The ***hechsher must clearly identify the product.**
- Use **unused disposables**

Basic Terms

Chalav Yisrael / Cholov Yisrael (*CHA-lav Yis-ra-EIL*) – Jewish milk; products with dairy ingredients that are made from Jewish milk.
Fleishig (*FLAY-shig*) – "Meaty." Describes actual meat items, such as cold cuts, and foods with meat ingredients.
Hashgachah *(Hash-GA-chah* or *Hash-ga-CHAH*). Kosher supervision.
Hechsher *(HEKH-sher)*. Plural **hechsherim** or **hechshers**. Literally 'affirmation of fitness.' Kosher symbol on a product indicating that it was produced under rabbinical supervision.
Kosher *(KOH-sher)* – Literally 'fit.' Acceptable for eating.

Kashrut *(Kash-ROOT) or* **Kashrus** *(KASH–rus) or* **Kashruth** *(KASH-ruth)* – Literally 'fitness.' The system of Jewish dietary laws; the state of being "Kosher"
Mashgiach (*Mash-GI-ach*). Kosher supervisor.
Milchig (*MIL-khig)* **–** "Milky" Any milk or food with milk or other dairy ingredients.
Pareve *(PAR-veh or PAH-rev)* – Neither meat nor dairy; "neutral." Fish, eggs (yes, despite coming from fowl), fruit, vegetables, grains, spices, and their pure derivatives.
Pas Yisrael/Pat Yisrael – "Jewish bread." Baked goods in whose baking a Jew plays a significant role.
Treif (Trafe) – Literally 'torn.' The opposite of Kosher; forbidden, not suitable for use.
Yashan/Yoshon – 'from the previous harvest' – Products made with grain that took root before the previous Passover.

Products and process

To be considered Kosher, all ingredients in a food must be inherently kosher. In addition, the following process requirements must be met:

- All aspects of production must ensure that nothing has occurred to the ingredients to render them non-kosher. If the same equipment is used to process non-kosher food is used to process kosher food without an intervening koshering process, the resulting product will not be kosher.
- Meat and milk may not be prepared or served together ("Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk.")
- Kosher foods should not be cooked or reheated in non-kosher dishes, ovens, microwaves or cut with non-kosher implements
- Kosher food should be served on kosher dishes. **Unused disposables, including disposable serving pieces, are best for this purpose**
- Kosher observant clients and colleagues will usually want to see clear indication that a processed food (a food that has been chopped, cooked, roasted, pickled, cultured, flavored, enriched, ….) has a ***hechsher/kosher sign** (more about that below) that indicates its kosher status
- Practical applications:
    - Only provide kosher-observant clients and colleagues with food that is ready-to-eat
    - If the food has been processed in any way, it must bear a kosher sign that clearly attests to its kosher status.

Meat, eggs, fish, milk – and products made with them

Kosher food made from or with meat is called *fleishig. The most common kinds of kosher meat are beef and chicken. Rules about the preparation and handling of kosher meat are quite complex.

- Practical application: **Do not serve meat products to kosher-observant clients and colleagues** outside of a restaurant or when using a kosher caterer

Eggs, although they come from "fleishig" chickens, are "pareve" (neutral, neither dairy nor meat). Rules about the preparation of eggs are complex.

Kosher fish are ones that have both fins and scales. They are "pareve."

- Practical application: **Kosher fish products such as sushi may be served to kosher-observant clients and colleagues, so long as they bear a kosher sign that clearly attests to kosher status.**
- It is still advisable to consult in advance.

Kosher milk (typically from cows)

- Products made with milk or milk ingredients are called *milchig.
- Many kosher-observant people rely on the US Department of Agriculture regulations to fulfill rabbinic requirements for supervision of milk.
- Many maintain a stricter practice and will only eat dairy products made from (and designated as) **Chalav/Cholov Yisrael* ("Jewish milk"). For many, products that have only *pareve ingredients yet are marked as "DE" (Dairy Equipment) are not acceptable.
- Cholov Yisrael products are typically available at specialty kosher stores or kosher sections of supermarkets.

Cheese, yogurt, cream cheese, sour cream, leben, etc. – Must bear an accepted *hechsher

- **Kosher dairy products may be served to kosher-observant clients and colleagues. If these clients and colleagues are strict about Cholov Yisrael, it is a mark of sensitivity to make Cholov Yisrael options available to them.**
- If colleagues/clients have recently eaten meat, they will not be able to eat dairy foods (including Cholov Yisrael chocolate). **You can rarely go wrong with *pareve foods.**

Vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains

Unless processed with dairy or meat ingredients, food from plants (fruits, vegetables, grain products, legumes, nuts) are pareve.

Raw fruits like apples, clementines, or grapes may be served whole.

Vegetables that require cooking should not be served to kosher-observant clients and colleagues.

Fruits and Vegetables that harbor many **insects** (such as lettuces, broccoli, raspberries) should not be served to kosher-observant clients and colleagues.

Fruits and vegetables grown in Israel have special requirements due to the sanctity of the land of Israel.

- Practical applications: Do not serve fresh Israeli fruits or vegetables to kosher-observant clients and colleagues. Many products from Israel containing fruits or vegetables bear widely-accepted hechshers.

Products with **grape juice** (including many products that are sweetened with concentrated grape juice) require ***hashgachah.**

Nuts. Raw, untreated nuts do not pose a kosher challenge. Nuts are often sprayed with oils, flavored, or roasted—such nuts require ***hashgachah.**

*Pas Yisrael/Pat Yisrael. Some kosher observant people will only eat baked products when a significant part of the baking process is played by a Jew. Such products are labeled "Pas Yisrael/Pat Yisrael" and are available at certain bakeries (such as North Shore on Touhy Ave.) and at kosher stores/kosher sections of groceries stores.

Yoshon concerns - New grain. Some kosher observant people will not eat products made with grain that had not taken root before the second day of the previous Passover until the *next* Passover. Since baked products with new grain are available as of late summer, such people will look for a sign indicating that cookies or bread, etc., are *yashan/yoshon *(*from the "old harvest"). Yoshon baked products are available at certain bakeries (such as North Shore on Touhy Ave.) and at kosher stores/kosher sections of groceries stores.

- Practical application. If you are aware that clients/colleagues are strict about Pas Yisrael or Yoshon, it is a mark of sensitivity to make Pas Yisrael/Yoshon products available to them. Please note that not all Pas Yisrael products are also Yoshon.

Passover

The rules of Passover are very strict. Not only leavened products such as bread and cookie but also products with minute quantities of grain ingredients are forbidden. There are customary restrictions on legumes and their derivatives, and many stringencies about cooking implements.

- Practical application. It is best and simplest not to serve any food to kosher observant clients and colleagues during Passover, except for individually wrapped kosher-for-Passover baked treats (typically made of potato starch!).

Kosher stores and establishments

See https://consumer.crckosher.org/kosher-establishments/ and https://consumer.crckosher.org/kosher-establishments/

Kosher symbols (*Hechshers)

Kosher symbols imprinted on foods indicate that rabbinical kosher supervision was provided during food production. There are many hechshers. Staff should follow the list of acceptable

hechshers provided by the cRc (see https://consumer.crckosher.org/acceptable-kashrus-agencies/)

"Acceptable hechshers." Bear in mind that not all hechshers are accepted by large numbers of kosher observant people. Some of the most widespread and commonly accepted hechshers on food available in the Chicago area are:

"cRc," Chicago Rabbinical Council "OU," Orthodox Union

"OK," Organized Kashrus Laboratories "Kof-K," Kof-K Kosher Supervision

"Star-K," Star K Kosher Supervision

A few Israeli hechshers:

Edah Chareidis, Jerusalem Rav Landa, Bnei Brak

Hechshers are registered trademarks in the US and have legal force.

The letter "K" by itself on a product has no legal meaning in the U.S. and does not, in and of itself, indicate that the product is kosher.

An assertion that all a products' ingredients are Kosher also does not have legal meaning.

Frequent Additions to a Hechsher

"D" next to a hechsher indicates that the product includes dairy ingredients or has been prepared on dairy equipment. Example: OU-D. Such products should only be used with dairy dishes and at a dairy meal.

"DE" Dairy equipment. For many who are strict about *Chalav Yisrael, a product with *pareve ingredients that is produced on Dairy Equipment will not meet their kosher needs.

"Meat". Containing meat or meat derivatives. Example: OU-Meat.

"P" next to a hechsher indicates that the product is kosher for Passover. Example: OU-P.

Additional Resources

Aish.com (http://www.aish.com/jl/m/mm/48958906.html)

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