

Cultural and Religious Food Practices

Community Meal Events Resource

Organization members, volunteers, community members, and event attendees may come from cultures and backgrounds different from your own. This information sheet is intended to introduce you to food practices and customs common in other cultures.

This training presents best practices for food safety based on science-based evidence. Some cultural and religious food practices may differ in some ways from the information presented in the CME training; however, difference from American food preparation and safety practices does not make them inherently wrong or unsafe.

If food safety is of concern, it is encouraged that the food safety risk be assessed and, if needed, an appropriate combination of best practice and cultural practice be implemented. For instance, in many cultures, poultry is usually washed with water, citrus, or vinegar prior to preparation and cooking. This becomes a food safety concern because bacteria found on the raw poultry can spread to kitchen surfaces, equipment, or utensils during washing. The best practice would be to just not wash the poultry. However, other methods could include having a separate area in the kitchen for washing the poultry and thoroughly cleaning and sanitizing the area and any equipment or utensils nearby after washing the poultry. An emphasis would also be placed on cooking the poultry to the correct internal temperature of 165°F to kill bacteria.

Additionally, it is important when discussing cultural food practices to not challenge, mock, or discredit an individual's or group's customs, knowledge, or skills. The information presented here is a brief overview and is not intended to cover all practices in all cultures.

Common Cultural Food Practices

1. Storage of food/leftovers outside of the refrigerator
2. Washing or rinsing meat and/or poultry in water, vinegar, and/or lemon juice
3. Use of food past expiration or best by dates
4. Cold storage and cold-holding food directly on ice
5. Rinsing rice and other grains prior to cooking
6. Sorting and rinsing beans and legumes prior to cooking
7. Utilizing equipment and utensils for multiple tasks without cleaning and/or sanitizing
8. Braising or marinating at room temperature
9. Washing raw foods with soap
10. Bare hand contact when preparing, mixing, or serving food
11. Thawing frozen food at ambient air temperature
12. Thawing frozen food by submerging in water
13. Reusing ingredients in different recipes (i.e. reusing oil, water, etc.)

Religious Food Practices

Halal

- Halal foods are foods that are allowed under the Islamic laws and dietary guidelines. Those foods that are not allowed are:
 - Pork and pork by products
 - Dogs, snakes, and monkeys
 - Carnivorous animals with claws and fangs such as lions, tigers, or bears
 - Birds of prey with claws such as eagles or vultures
 - Pests
 - Animals forbidden to be killed in Islam
 - Animals that live both on land and in water s
 - Mules and domestic donkeys
 - All poisonous and hazardous aquatic animals
 - Any other animals not slaughtered according to Islamic Law
 - Blood and blood by products
 - Intoxicating and hazardous plants except where the toxin or hazard can be eliminated during processing
 - Alcohol and other intoxicating and hazardous drinks
- Permissible animal products must be slaughtered according to the rules in the *Codex Recommended Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Meat*.

Kosher

- Kosher foods are foods that are allowed to be eaten under the Jewish dietary law.
 - Must be made from kosher ingredients
 - Must be processed on kosher equipment
- Meat/Poultry:
 - Mammals that chew their cud and are cloven-hoofed (i.e. cow, goat)
 - There are 24 forbidden species of fowl and those not forbidden are considered kosher
 - Must be slaughtered in the *shechita* manner
 - Slaughtered animals must be inspected by a trained inspector for any abnormalities
 - Some species of animal require the cutting and removal of blood vessels, nerves, and fat
 - Blood consumption is prohibited in the Kosher diet, thus blood is removed from meat through salting or broiling.
- Fish:
 - Fish must have fins and scales, and scales must be easily removed without damaging the skin
 - Shellfish are forbidden
- Fish and meat may not be eaten together but can be served as one course after another
- Meat and milk cannot be cooked or eaten together
- Milk cannot be consumed after eating meat for some time, usually six hours
- Kitchens must be equipped with two sets of equipment and utensils, one for meat/poultry and one for dairy foods.
- Oils, emulsifiers, and flavors must not be made from animal fats or processed on the same equipment as animal fats.
- Dairy:
 - Supervision is required during milking to verify that the source of the milk is a kosher animal (USDA inspection/supervision is accepted)
 - Cheese is produced with microbial rennet rather than animal derived rennet
- *Pareve* indicates that the food product does not contain meat or dairy products and was not processed on equipment that processed meat or dairy products

Vegetarianism

- Many religions practice some form of vegetarianism. Generally, a vegetarian diet excludes eating meat, poultry, and fish.
 - Buddhism: Lacto-vegetarianism
 - Though the religion does not prescribe this diet, this diet is encouraged and common.
 - Lacto-vegetarians include dairy products but exclude meat, fish, poultry, and eggs in their diet.
 - Hinduism: Lacto-vegetarianism
 - Lacto-vegetarians include dairy products but exclude meat, fish,

- poultry, and eggs in their diet.
- Sikhism: Lacto-vegetarian
 - Lacto-vegetarians include dairy products but exclude meat, fish, poultry, and eggs in their diet.
 - Dairy must be free from animal fat or products, such as cheese made from animal rennet rather than microbial rennet
 - Some Sikhs do eat meat that has been slaughtered according to Ohatka requirements.
- Jainism: Vegetarianism
 - This religion practices non-violence and as such excludes meat, fish, poultry, and eggs from the diet. They also refrain from eating root vegetables and honey.
- Rastafarianism: Pescatarian
 - Pescatarians include fish but exclude meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs in their diet.
 - Fish must be less than 12 inches long
 - Shellfish is prohibited from the diet
 - Avoidance of salt, oil, and alcohol

Resources:

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