

CATERING AND FAITH BASED DIETARY PRACTICE

Some key principles

Faith based dietary practice is taken very seriously by many people of faith in Britain today. It is an important and positive aspect of their personal commitment to living out their faith.

It is important for people to be free to live out their personal beliefs, whether religious or non-religious, including in matters of dietary practice. It is not appropriate for choices of food and drink to be imposed on people regardless of their religious, cultural, social or ethnic background. Sensitivity and care should therefore be exercised when catering for those who follow particular dietary practice for reasons of their belief, whether religious or non-religious.

There is a move towards more inclusive provision for differing dietary requirements, reflecting and respecting the diversity of multi-faith Britain. This is to be encouraged and welcomed.

To assist in supporting and broadening the pattern of catering provision for multi faith contexts and deepening understanding of faith based dietary needs, the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) has worked with member faith community representative bodies to draw together some guidance designed to help those catering in public and private institutions for people of a range of different faith backgrounds. In addition to the broad principles outlined above, this includes:

1. Some general points on catering for a religiously diverse clientele
2. Some more detailed points about particular issues
3. A chart setting out dietary practice in relation to a range of ingredients. The chart has a glossary of key terms

1. SOME GENERAL POINTS ON CATERING FOR A RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE CLIENTELE

- a) It is important that public institutions, such as schools, hospitals and prisons, ensure that the different dietary practices of those served by them are properly met in what is provided for them. This is especially important in the case of institutions like prisons, hospitals and some schools where those being served are unable to eat elsewhere.
- b) It is also desirable for private sector firms providing catering facilities for public institutions or facilities used by the general public (such as sports facilities or entertainment complexes) to familiarise themselves with the wide range of dietary needs of the diverse population of modern Britain, and to ensure a suitably broad range of provision.
- c) It is recommended that when catering for people of faith, institutions be clear about specific requirements their clientele have so that they are aware of the range of dietary practice with which they are working. It is recognised that mass catering for the full range of specific dietary requirements can be complex. One way for public institutions to approach the issue is to invite all those using their catering service on a regular basis to fill in forms regarding their dietary practices so that the available options can be adjusted accordingly.
- d) In institutions that cater for people from a wide range of faith communities it is good practice to have meat and vegetarian options (in the case of main courses a full vegetarian dish and not just vegetable side dishes); and, where required, correctly slaughtered meat (on which there is further information below). Vegan options will desirably be readily available.
- e) Public institutions, private sector firms and restaurants should be aware of issues surrounding the correct labeling of meat slaughtered in accordance with religious guidelines: *dhabihah* (Islamic) or *schechita* (Jewish) slaughter processes that results in *halal* and *kosher* meat respectively. This is an important part of the religious practices of these religions.²
- f) It is also important to be aware that those Sikhs who eat meat (not all do) follow guidance in the *Rehit Maryada* which prohibits the eating of meat slaughtered in accordance with guidelines of other religions (*kutha*) such as *halal* and *kosher* meat.
- g) Institutions should be aware of the views of Jews, Muslims and Sikhs on slaughter and should take care to source their meat and other foodstuffs

² The Christian-Muslim Forum released a detailed briefing on this issue in November 2010 that is available at: www.christianmuslimforum.org/index.php/working-together/news/halal-statement

accordingly, making sure that they have traceability of the origins of their meat to ensure a defensible procurement procedure.

- h) Institutions should also be able, as necessary, to respond to queries about ingredients in food which may be inappropriate for some following faith based dietary practice which does not permit eating of particular items, for example eggs or egg derived products.
- i) If alcohol is served in an institution it is important to be sensitive to the needs of clients who do not drink alcohol for religious reasons.
- j) Restaurants will offer a particular menu of their choice and customers will choose whether to eat there or not. However, it is important that restaurants are able to inform customers on request what ingredients are used in their dishes as well as to provide other relevant information, including whether or not meat used has been slaughtered in accordance with particular faith defined regulations (for example *kosher* or *halal* slaughter).

2. SOME MORE DETAILED POINTS ABOUT PARTICULAR ISSUES

- a) Particular dietary practices are to be found in a whole range of faiths, including some branches of Christianity. The attached chart offers a broad outline of dietary practice in the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jain, Jewish, Sikh and Zoroastrian faith traditions.²
- b) While in many faith communities the majority of observant members will follow the same practice, such as the consumption of 'halal' food by most Muslims, there are communities in which dietary practices may differ between different followers of the same faith. For example, while most Hindus follow a vegetarian diet, a significant minority will eat meat, though all are likely to avoid beef because of respect in the Hindu tradition for the cow.
- c) The way food is prepared and served is an essential part of faith based dietary practice in some traditions. This is especially important in Judaism where during the preparation of *kosher* meals different sets of preparation implements, preparation surfaces and storage areas for meat and dairy products can be required by those who adhere to *kashrut* law. When catering for Jewish clients who keep *kosher* it is often advisable to purchase specially prepared and sealed *kosher* meals from a certified supplier to avoid complications³.
- d) When catering for a mixed faith group care should be taken to ensure that during the preparation, cooking and serving of food, kitchen implements and

² Faith communities presently linked at the national level by IFN.

³ Advice is available from the website of the London *Beth Din Kashrut* division at: (<http://www.kosher.org.uk/>).

serving utensils have not come into contact with ingredients that some clients would not be able to consume. For example, strict practitioners of Hindu or Jain faiths or Sikh vegetarians may require that equipment and utensils have not come into contact with meat, fish or egg and when catering for Muslims cookery implements and eating utensils that have come into contact with pork, other non-halal meats or alcohol should not be used. During the preparation of *kosher* meals implements that have come into contact with non-*kosher* substances should not be used and separate implements should be used for meat and dairy products. Some of the complications that arise from this can be avoided by the use of disposable plates, cutlery and serving implements.

- e) Where there are foodstuffs present that some will not consume it is advisable to keep these separate when in storage, preparation and serving.
- f) There are some faiths, such as Jainism, in which some strictly observant adherents may wish to eat food prepared in their own kitchen. It is advisable to find out whether this is the case and to make arrangements for those who wish to bring their own food to do so if they wish.
- g) In a number of faiths, including Hinduism, Jainism and Judaism, some observant members will not eat cut fruit. It is, therefore recommended to supply some whole fruit in mixed faith settings.
- h) When catering for people of diverse faiths, caterers will find it helpful to be aware of whether members of particular faiths are marking festivals or fast-days as faith based dietary requirements can alter during periods of religious observance and celebration. This can involve changes to the times of meals: for example, Muslims must eat after sundown during Ramadan and Jains will often fast for the duration of Paryushana and any food that is consumed must be eaten between sunrise and sunset. Festivals can also change what is eaten: for example, in the run-up to and during Pesach observant Jewish people will avoid all biologically fermented (*chametz*) foodstuffs. Other people of faith may also have special observances or observe more closely than usual their faith's food laws during festival periods. For example, many Hindus will maintain a vegetarian diet during Diwali and Navratri even though they might eat some meat at other times and many Sikhs who normally eat meat will not do so on festive occasions.

Faith Based Dietary Practice - a chart for caterers

Faith	Meat/Poultry	Seafood	Eggs	Dairy Products	Vegetables	Fruit/Nuts	Alcohol	Caffeine	Additives	Other
Baha'i							Observant Bahai's will not consume alcohol			
Buddhism	Some Buddhists practise vegetarianism, often linked to an interpretation of the first principle of 'do no harm'. Buddhists may also follow the advice of the Buddha against eating certain animals not commonly consumed including boar and horse. There is great regional variation in Buddhist consumption of meat, fish and poultry. Some Buddhists practise a form of vegetarianism that precludes the eating of eggs.			Dairy products that contain animal derived ingredients (such as animal rennet in some cheeses) will not be consumed by vegetarian Buddhists.	Some Buddhists, often from China or Vietnam, will not eat the 'five pungent spices' - onions, garlic, leeks, chives, scallions.		Some Buddhists will not consume alcohol.		Vegetarian Buddhists will not eat additives derived from animal products.	
Christianity	A small minority of Christians interpret strict observance of their faith to include practising vegetarianism and the non-eating of meat slaughtered in accordance with the guidelines of other religions.						Some Christians interpret strict observance of their faith to include not drinking alcohol.			
Hinduism	Many Hindus practise vegetarianism and avoid all meat, poultry and seafood. While some Hindus may consume meat, observant Hindus will avoid beef out of respect for the cow and others may avoid pork and some shellfish. Hindus practise a form of vegetarianism that precludes the eating of eggs.			Dairy products that contain animal derived ingredients (such as animal rennet in some cheeses) will not be consumed by vegetarian Hindus.	Strictly observant Hindus may avoid consuming onions, garlic and mushrooms/fungi.	Strictly observant Hindus may avoid consuming cut fruit and shelled nuts.	Strictly observant Hindus will not consume alcohol.	Strictly observant Hindus may avoid consuming tea, coffee or other caffeinated products.	Vegetarian Hindus will not eat additives derived from animal products	
Islam	Observant Muslims will never consume pork products and only consume <i>halal</i> meat and poultry slaughtered in accordance with the <i>dhabihah</i> religious guidelines.	Some observant Muslims will not consume shellfish, although some make an exception for shrimp and prawns.		Observant Muslims will not consume dairy products that contain animal derived ingredients from pork or other non <i>dhabihah</i> slaughtered animals.			Observant Muslims will not consume alcohol.		Observant Muslims will not consume additives that are derived from any non- <i>halal</i> source. A list of the <i>halal</i> status of additives can be found here: http://tinyurl.com/9z7rwee	
Jainism	Observant Jains follow a strict dietary code based on the principle of <i>ahimsa</i> (non-violence) and will therefore not consume any meat, poultry, seafood or eggs.			Observant Jains will not consume dairy products that contain animal derived ingredients.	Strictly observant Jains will avoid eating root vegetables, garlic, onions, leeks, chives, scallion and mushrooms/fungi. Vegetables that contain many seeds (such as aubergines) may also be avoided.	Strictly observant Jains will avoid eating fruits that contain many seeds (such as figs). They may also not consume cut fruit and shelled nuts.	Observant Jains will not consume alcohol.	Strictly observant Jains will avoid consuming tea, coffee or other caffeinated products.	Observant Jains will not eat additives derived from animal products.	Observant Jains will avoid consuming honey, and avoid un-boiled water to minimise the consumption of microscopic organisms.
Judaism	Observant Jews will only consume <i>kosher</i> meat (usually beef/lamb and never pork) or poultry as prescribed by <i>kashrut</i> law. All must be slaughtered in accordance with the <i>schechita</i> religious guidelines.	Observant Jews will only consume fish with fins and scales. They will not consume any shellfish.		While observant Jews will consume dairy products, dietary practice laws require the separation of meat and dairy products in the preparation of food.		Strictly observant Jews may avoid consuming cut fruit and shelled nuts.	Some observant Jews will only consume grape derived alcohol which has been prepared under <i>kosher</i> conditions.		Observant Jews will not consume additives that are derived from any non- <i>kosher</i> source. The <i>kosher</i> status of additives is given here: http://tinyurl.com/v8ncq .	
Sikhism	Sikhs who eat meat will not eat meat slaughtered according to guidelines of other religions (<i>kutha</i>). Because of their respect for the sensitivities of Hindus and Muslims, some who do so may avoid the eating of beef and pork.	Sikhs who practise vegetarianism will consume neither seafood nor eggs.		Dairy products that contain animal derived ingredients (such as animal rennet in some cheeses) will not be consumed by vegetarian Sikhs.			Observant Sikhs will not consume alcohol.		Vegetarian Sikhs will not eat additives derived from animal products.	
Zoroastrianism										

Glossary

Halal Something that is *halal* is something that is permitted for Muslims, the opposite being something that is forbidden (*haram*). In the context of dietary practice *halal* refers usually to ingredients but it is important that food is not contaminated by *haram* products such as alcohol.

Dhabihah The permitted method of slaughter in Muslim law.

Kosher For something to be considered *kosher* it must adhere to Jewish *kashrut* law. In the context of dietary practice this can mean the ingredients themselves and the methods of preparation and serving.

Kutha Sikh term from the *Rehit Maryada* that refers to meat slaughtered in accordance with guidelines of other religions - for example meat slaughtered in accordance to *dhabihah* (Muslim) and *schechita* (Jewish) guidelines that result in *halal* meat and *kosher* meat respectively). Sikhs will not consume *kutha* meat.

Schechita The permitted method of slaughter and butchery in Jewish *kashrut* law

Ultra-Observance

Within the prescribed dietary practice of a faith community there can be a wide range of interpretation and adherence. This chart aims to show what is commonly observed as well as common variations of practice.

Within every faith community with dietary practice rules there are those who are 'ultra observant' in their dietary practice, taking the guidelines further than others within the community when putting them into practice. The range of ultra observance is not covered in this chart as in each case only a minority will adhere to these models. However caterers should be aware that some people of faith may be ultra observant and should take every reasonable step to accommodate them wherever possible.

Chart

This chart covers the dietary practices of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian traditions presently linked in membership by the Inter Faith Network at the national level. It has been compiled with the assistance of these faith communities.

This chart is designed to be read in conjunction with the text of the briefing note on 'Catering and Faith Based Dietary Practice.'

Where a field is blank this means that those from the faith community in question are likely to have no issue eating these ingredients.

Further Information

National faith community bodies can provide more detailed advice on the dietary practices of their traditions should this be required as well, in some cases, on the acceptability or otherwise of particular additives.

To contact faith community bodies in membership of the Inter Faith Network visit: www.interfaith.org.uk/members/national-faith-bodies

The Inter Faith Network for the UK closed in 2024, with outward facing operations ceasing in April.

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