

Religion and Diet

OVERVIEW

Religious identity is a crucial dimension of a comprehensive Diversity & Inclusion strategy. Tanenbaum recognizes that religious identity and practices will show up in different ways, as workplaces increasingly encourage their employees to bring their whole selves to work. This includes employees' diets. Religious beliefs often mandate not only what people can or cannot eat, but also how food is prepared and served. We present this resource as a reference, to help clarify some important terminology around religious dietary restrictions.

This resource is by no means meant to be exhaustive. It should be noted that adherents of many major religions will at times alter their diets. The information that follows is intended to provide practical guidance for providing inclusive dietary options and supplemental explanations of the most common dietary restrictions.

INCLUSIVE OPTIONS

Tanenbaum recommends employers make kosher, halal, and vegetarian options available for different company functions and events as standard practice whenever possible. Across your company's cafeterias and food kiosks, employees should have the option to request kosher/halal/vegetarian options.

SERVING FOOD AT AN EVENT?

- Be Curious - Ask about dietary restrictions!
- Include space for employees to request inclusive options on event registration forms and reminders.
- Consult with vendors to ensure they can provide a full range of inclusive dietary options.
- Ensure that food items are stored and served in ways that maintain their integrity.

KOSHER

Kosher (*kashrut* in Hebrew) are dietary restrictions to which some Jewish people adhere to varying degrees. There are three categories of Kosher food; meat, dairy, and *pareve*. *Pareve* refers to foods that are neither meat nor dairy, such as eggs, vegetables, and others. Some Jewish people choose to eat only kosher meat, which is specially prepared with particular rituals, including being cooked in a kitchen that has been blessed by a rabbi. People who keep kosher typically don't eat pork or shellfish. For dairy to be kosher, the animal from which it comes must also be blessed according to Jewish tradition. Food is not considered to be kosher if meat and milk products mix in the same meal.

Additional resources:

- [Kosher Food: What Makes Food Kosher or Not](#)
- [Kosher: A Guide to Eating Jewishly](#)

HALAL

Halal are the dietary restrictions to which some Muslim people adhere to varying degrees. The word *halal* means “permissible” in Arabic and can sometimes be interpreted as “lawful.” This is the opposite of the Arabic word *haram*, or “forbidden.” Some Muslim people only eat halal meat, which is specially prepared with particular rituals, a process referred to as *Zibah* or *Zabinah*. There are specific requirements ranging from the treatment of animal to the method of their slaughter that must be met in order for meat to qualify as halal.

Additional resources:

- [Definition of Halal](#)
- [Understanding Halal Foods](#)

COMMONALITIES / DIFFERENCES

Though halal and kosher guidelines are not the same and each have their own particular requirements and rituals, they do overlap in some ways. The method of animal slaughter required for meat products is one example, as is the prohibition of pork products. Many Muslims even find it permissible to consume kosher meat products. It should be noted, however, that halal meat isn’t considered kosher.

There are also notable differences, including around alcohol and the mixing of dairy and meat. In Islam, alcohol is technically considered to be haram, and as a result, some Muslims do not consume alcohol. However, in Judaism, alcohol is allowed and there are wines, liquors and beers that adhere to kosher law. Additionally, the kosher ban on the mixing of dairy and meat is not an issue under halal rules.

It should also be noted that there are additional dietary requirements associated with some Jewish and Muslim holidays. Some Muslims, for example, will fast during the month of Ramadan. Jewish employees, meanwhile, might choose to fast during Yom Kippur. Some holidays, such as Passover, have their own rules about which types of food can be consumed.

As there are many personal expressions within religions, people who adhere to religion-based dietary restrictions may have individual and varied interpretations of their adherence to those restrictions. Likewise, adherents of certain religions might not follow any religious guidelines with regard to food.

VEGETARIANISM/VEGANISM

Kosher and halal foods are certainly not the only religiously-motivated dietary guidelines. Adherents of many different faith traditions cite their religious beliefs in their adherence to vegetarian or vegan diets. Some religions, such as Jainism or Hinduism are more explicit in mandating a vegetarian diet. Some adherents of the Rastafari faith, for example, follow an Ital diet. An Ital diet is vegetarian or vegan, though some Rastas may eat fish. While a vegetarian or vegan diet might not be explicitly mandated by some religious traditions, it is not uncommon for individuals to cite their faiths as reasons for adhering to vegetarian or vegan diets.

THE HINDU FAITH AND BEEF

There is a deep tradition of vegetarianism within the Hindu faith, though not all Hindus are vegetarians. It should also be noted that not all types of meat are considered acceptable by non-vegetarian Hindus. The consumption of beef can be a sensitive subject, with some adherents of the faith choosing to abstain from consuming the meat. As with all religious communities, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices within

Hinduism, so different adherents may have different religious dietary restrictions. Ensuring inclusive food options is a simple way to avoid miscommunications and exclusion from workplace events.

FASTING

Something common across faith traditions both large and small in size is the concept of fasting. Adherents of any number of religious traditions may periodically choose to fast, though the significance of fasting varies across and within traditions. Fasting is often connected to, but not limited to, the concepts of repentance, discipline, spiritual clarity, and purification.

Fasting can be associated with certain holidays or times of year. For example, some Muslims choose to fast during the month of Ramadan and some Jews fast on Yom Kippur. Fasting might also precede a religious ritual or ceremony. It's important to note, however, that fasting isn't limited to fixed holidays or time periods. The timing and reasons for individual's fasts can depend on any number of personal circumstances associated with their own faith journeys.

What foods and beverages are restricted during a fast can vary greatly across faith traditions and from individual to individual. Some faiths require abstaining from any food or beverages for certain periods of the day, such as the Baha'i' during Ala, and are at later times permitted to break fasts. Some other forms of religious fasting might only apply to certain types of food or drink. Catholics, for example, might choose to forego the consumption of certain foods or drinks during Lent.

For more useful information on world religions, subscribe to Tanenbaum's online resource, [Religion at Work: A \(Human\) Resource](#). Visit the Tanenbaum [Workplace Resources](#) page for additional Tanenbaum Fact Sheets or contact Tanenbaum at workplacediversity@tanenbaum.org with questions.