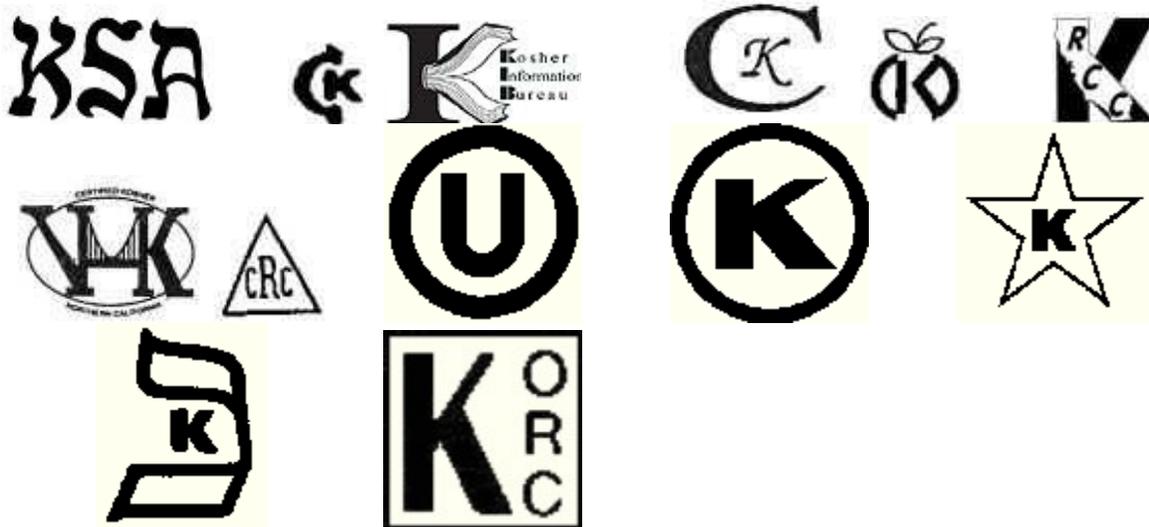


Kashrut Guidelines, Stage 1

Q. How do I know if something in today's market is certified Kosher?

A. When the option exists, you look for a sign called a "hechsher" or Kosher Symbol. There are a large number of symbols – some of the ones you will see include:



Q. Where do I find these symbols?

A. Finding the Hechsher is somewhat like any other picture finding exercise, since there isn't a Federal requirement or guideline for placement on the package. I have seen Kosher symbols in the upper right corner, the lower left corner, within the picture of the food and in the ingredients section. I have seen the symbols be easily visible, and I have also seen them be almost invisible (blue ink on a picture of a blueberry, for example).

Q. I've seen the letter K on some packages. Doesn't that mean it is Kosher?

A. I won't say that it never could mean that. However, the letter K is not a copyrightable symbol, and theoretically anybody could use it. Therefore I don't accept that symbol on a package as meaning the item is certified Kosher.

Q. I've seen some letters used with these symbols. What do they mean?

A. A "D" means the item is dairy, and should not be served with meat. A "P" means the item is acceptable for use on Passover as well as during the year. A "DE" means the item was prepared on equipment that was also used to process dairy items, and the meticulous won't serve it with meat.

Q. Are there items without certification that are Kosher?

A. Certainly. Fresh fruits and vegetables are good examples of foods that need no rabbinic supervision to be 100% Kosher.

More Kashrut Q and A

Q. I don't live on a farm. Does "don't boil a baby goat in its mother's milk" still apply?

A. If we could be certain that no Jewish person would ever drink goat's milk or eat goat meat then I would argue that this provision should be understood as a metaphor. I can't be certain of this, so the rule still applies. Personally, since I don't know the familial relationship between the animals which supplied the meat I eat and the milk I drink, I make certain that there is no chance I will "accidentally on purpose" slip up.

Q. How do you do that?

A. 1) I don't eat them at the same meal. 2) I don't have milk until 3 hours after having meat. (Some people pick 1 hour, others 6.) 3) I even use different dishes, silverware, pots and pans. One set is for dairy meals and one set for meat meals, so the tastes have no chance to combine.

Q. Chickens don't give milk, as far as I know. Fish don't either. Is chicken treated like fish or like cattle?

A. In some parts of the world and for a few moments in history, chicken was thought to be just like fish. Today in America chicken is treated as if it was a member of the herd.

Q. I remember that fish need to have fins and scales. How is fish treated?

A. Fish is considered pareve.

Q. And that means ...?

A. Fish, and anything else that is neither dairy nor meat, can be eaten with either a dairy meal or a meat meal.

Q. People keep talking about Kosher meat, and nothing I've heard so far mentions it. What else do I need to know about the process?

A. Only animals which chew their cud and have completely cleft hooves have a chance of being kosher. In order to get the kosher certification, the animals have to be killed by a shochet (a ritual slaughterer) who uses a very sharp knife in a specific manner, so the animal dies relatively quickly and the blood is almost completely drained. Then the meat is treated to further remove any blood that's still present. If you've heard about soaking and salting, that's what it refers to. The sciatic vein (on the hind legs) is not to be eaten, so those portions are either given/sold to non-Jews or the vein is removed.

Still More Kashrut Q & A

Q: I recently moved into town, and there's a particular brand of food I like. Where I used to live it had a kashrut symbol and now it doesn't. What gives?

A: Supervision is supplied to specific production and packaging plants. When a plant is not supervised, food from that plant won't get a kashrut symbol, even if the entire process is identical to that of another plant which is supervised, and whose products receive a kashrut symbol.

Q: So none of the brands of "Doohickey Crème" that I have seen have a kashrut symbol. Is there a plan B?

A: Plan B, in this particular case, is to read the label. Ask yourself the following: Does the word "lard" or "animal" appear anywhere in the ingredients? [Not Kosher!] Do I know what all the terms used in the ingredients list mean, and where they come from? [Self-learning will help me turn a maybe into a yes or no.]

Use Plan B only when Plan A – looking for a kashrut symbol – hasn't worked.

Please note that some people refuse to use Plan B. They go straight to Plan C, which is travel to the nearest town where that item has a kashrut symbol.

Another dose of Kashrut Q & A

Q. I can understand how food might or might not be kosher. What's up with "kashering" stoves and other things? I doubt I'll ever be interested in eating a stove!

A. When a utensil or appliance is used to touch or contain food, then it usually absorbs a bit of the essence of the food. Cold utensils and appliances absorb less, hot utensils and appliances absorb more. Absorption can occur through direct contact or indirect contact, like steam.

Q. Do I have to throw things away if the wrong type of food got absorbed?

A. This is where the process starts getting complicated. Some utensils you will be able to save by "kashering." The process of rendering a utensil or appliance kosher involves cleaning the item completely and then bringing it to the same state it was in when the food was absorbed. For example, a pot used for boiling food must be cleaned, have the handles removed, and then boiled. A large pot is considered boiled after boiling water from a few other pots is poured over it, inside and out. Some people will then take this newly boiled pot to the ritual bath for dunking and ritual purification.

Q. I noticed you said "some" utensils. Which ones won't be able to be treated this way?

A. Wooden utensils, appliances with parts that can't be removed readily for cleaning and ceramic materials.

Q. Is there anything that doesn't need such drastic action?

A. During the last century, glass was considered to be non-porous, so a normal scrubbing and rinse-off, followed by a run through the dishwasher were considered sufficient.

This concludes the Kashrut overview. If you have a point you'd like clarified, please contact Rabbi Larry.