



# Jewish Food Practices

## and Celebrating Hanukkah

NUTRITION CONNECTION

Understanding the cultural significance of food during holidays is critical for person-centered care

Food plays a major role in almost all holidays and Jewish holiday meals are no exception. For Jewish, the holiday meals and foods represent landmark events while also commemorating spiritual history. The holiday season is a time abundant with memories of lighting menorahs, family and friends, and the house filled with the smell of fried potato latkes. Understanding the cultural significance of food during holidays is critical in providing “Person-Centered Care” and making the season a time of joy.

This article presents an overview of some of the beliefs and values associated with Jewish food practices and the celebration of Hanukkah (also Chanukah) as we strive to promote quality of life and care with food, nutrition, and dining.

### BACKGROUND

In 2016, the American Jewish Population Project at Brandeis University estimated the U.S. Jewish population at 7.2 million. Jewish adults are older, with 25 percent aged 65 years or older compared to just 19 percent of U.S. adults overall in this age group. Jewish adults also are more likely to be college graduates compared to U.S. adults overall. There are somewhat more Jewish women than Jewish men. Nearly 50 percent of the U.S. adult Jewish population lives in one of three states: New York, California, or Florida.

Jews are a people and not a religion. Jewishness and Judaism are not necessarily the same thing. While Judaism



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is generally the religion that Jews practice, there are Jewish people who “pick and choose” whichever elements of Judaism they find personally meaningful while others may not practice Judaism at all. Judaism is comprised of several “branches,” also called denominations or streams, that exist on a spectrum from traditionally religious to liberal.

Half a century ago, Judaism could be described as comprised of three main branches, and most Jews affiliated with one of them: Orthodox (traditional), Reform (liberal, in Europe also known as Liberal or Progressive), and Conservative (a middle-ground branch, known as Masorti outside North America). While these three major branches still exist, there is currently a broader spectrum to Judaism. For example, some may describe themselves as “Conservadox,” bridging Conservative and Orthodox Judaism.

## TRADITIONAL JEWISH FOODS

Jewish people have lived throughout the entire world, and traditional foods and food preparation will reflect the cooking styles of the various regions where they settled. In the United

States we see this variety as some individuals will eat a traditional “American Diet” while others may enjoy different ethnic cuisines. Some Jewish still observe kosher dietary laws and eat mostly traditional Jewish foods.

It is important to remember that Jewish food selections may be based on foods directly regulated by religious laws and food traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation that, over time, become a part of the special occasion.

Kosher food is essentially food that does not have any non-kosher ingredients in accordance with Jewish law. The kosher laws were commanded by God to the children of Israel in the Sinai Desert. Moses taught them to the people and wrote the basics of these laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Details were handed down through the generations and eventually written down in the Mishnah and Talmud. Various ordinances were enacted through the generations by the rabbinical authorities as safeguards for these biblical laws.

What makes something kosher is that meat and milk products are not mixed

together, animal products from non-kosher animals (like pork, shellfish, and others) are not included, and any meat from kosher animals is slaughtered using the correct procedure.

A number of other requirements need to be met, both in the process of food preparation and who performs the process.

In today’s world, because of the complexity of the kosher requirements and modes of food production, kosher certification is needed to confirm that all the criteria for kosher have been met. Kosher level is indicated by a symbol printed on the package representing an agency’s certification.

The four biggest kosher supervision agencies in the world originated and are headquartered in the U.S. Their symbols—the OU, KOF-K, OK, and STAR-K—are likewise the most readily recognized kosher certification symbols around the globe.

Some common terms relating to Jewish foods and food preparation include:

- **Kosher:** (Hebrew) The catch-all term that refers to all that is fit to be consumed or to be used together with kosher food.

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- **Kasher:** (Yiddish) The act of making something kosher. This can either refer to the salting of meat or to the process of making dishes or appliances kosher through the application of heat.
- **Treif:** (Hebrew) Literally, “torn,” referring to an animal that met an unnatural death other than shechitah, but extended to mean any food that is not fit to eat.
- **Parve:** (Yiddish) The in-between, neutral foods, which are neither meat nor dairy and may be eaten with both.
- **Fleishig:** (Yiddish) Meaty. Variants include fleishigs and fleishige.
- **Milchig:** (Yiddish) Milk or dairy. Variant: milchige.
- **Mashgiach:** (Hebrew) Supervisor, often appointed by a supervising agency to ensure that food produced at a commercial establishment is kosher.
- **Hashgachah:** (Hebrew) Supervision, and the certification thereof, often issued by a rabbi or a rabbinic agency.
- **Hechsher:** (Hebrew) Kosher certification, and the actual symbol denoting that a given product is certified kosher.
- **Glatt:** (Yiddish) Literally “smooth,” this refers to an

animal whose lungs have been found to be superbly healthy and free of adhesions. Since this is a higher standard of kosher, it has come to refer to food that is kosher according to the most exacting of standards.

- **Shechitah:** (Hebrew) Kosher slaughterer.
- **Shochet:** (Hebrew) Trained kosher slaughterer.
- **Chumrah:** (Hebrew) Additional stringencies that are beyond the letter of the law, which some communities or individuals may adopt.

#### JEWISH HOLIDAY FOODS AND HANUKKAH/CHANUKAH

Major Jewish holidays are so designated because of their place and position in Biblical history. Ten holidays fall into this category. Within this group are several more distinct groupings. Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) are considered High Holy Days (or High Holidays). The Three Pilgrimage Festivals, originally designated because they were supposed to be celebrated in Jerusalem, refers to the Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot holidays.

The Jewish calendar

uses the moon for basic calculations and then makes adjustments for the solar seasons so that certain holidays always occur in a particular season. Because of this, the actual dates for the Jewish holidays, which go by the Jewish months and days, move from year to year when compared to the strictly solar Gregorian calendar used today. Thus, Jewish holidays appear on different dates every year on the Western calendar, but stay the same on the Jewish calendar.

In 2018, Hanukkah begins at sundown on Sunday, Dec. 2 and lasts until sundown on Monday, Dec. 10. In Hebrew, the language from which the Jewish festival originates, the word for Hanukkah is not easily translated into English. This accounts for why there are so many spelling variants. But Hanukkah and Chanukah are the two versions most widely used and accepted.

The first recorded holiday celebrating religious freedom, Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem, wrecked by idol worshippers and recaptured by the Maccabees and their followers around 165 BC. Only one day’s worth of sacramental oil for the Eternal Light was found,

#### KOSHER DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN

traditional food. Senior living communities today are seeing fusion dishes and modern cuisine created with kosher ingredients growing in popularity.

but miraculously it lasted the eight days needed to prepare more. Thus, Hanukkah is known as the Festival of Lights—with one more candle on the nine-branched menorah lit each night—and also the festival of fried foods.

Traditional foods include applesauce, sour cream, latkes (potato pancakes), and foods fried in oil. Fried doughnuts sprinkled in cinnamon and sugar or coated in honey and gooey jelly doughnuts (sufganiyot) are all a part of the Hanukkah festivities.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSON-CENTERED CARE

Individualized or person-centered care for Jews requires the same considerations as for any other resident. Communication with good listening skills and rapport are critical to understand and respect independent thinking and to honor choice.

It is important to understand kosher dietary laws if the individual follows them. Ask specifically about the person's practices instead of just inquiring whether they "keep kosher." Also keep in mind their observances may actually impact meal planning in regards to not only the actual foods, but the activities in which they may participate.

Remember that kosher does not always mean traditional food. Senior living communities today are seeing fusion dishes and modern cuisine created with kosher ingredients growing in popularity. Many are seeking a Jewish environment and while kosher is not a major part of what they are initially looking for, it is part of what creates the Jewish environment.

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# RECIPES

## HANUKKAH



### DOUGHNUTS WITH FETA, HONEY, AND PISTACHIOS

*Vegetarian, Soy-Free*

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2-1/4 tsp. dry yeast
- 2 Tbsp. warm water
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 3/4 cup milk
- 6 Tbsp. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 egg
- 3 Tbsp. oil or melted butter
- 3+ cups flour
- Oil for frying
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/2 cup roughly chopped pistachios

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Place yeast, warm water, and 1 tsp. sugar in bowl. Let sit for 10 minutes until frothy.
2. Mix yeast mixture with the remaining sugar, oil, egg, salt, and soy/almond milk and 1 cup of flour on a low speed.
3. Slowly add in the rest of the flour until dough is no longer sticky. It should feel somewhat like a bread dough.
4. Knead for 5 minutes, then cover the bowl with a damp cloth and let rise approximately 1 hour, until dough has doubled in size.
5. Roll the dough into small balls. Lay them on parchment paper and let rise 30-60 minutes.
6. Heat oil in a frying pan or pot. Drop in a few doughnuts at a time. Flip each doughnut so each side can brown.
7. Remove the doughnuts from the oil and place on a plate lined with paper towels to absorb the excess oil.
8. Transfer the doughnuts to a serving platter. Drizzle generously with honey, and sprinkle with crumbled feta and chopped pistachios.



### SIMPLE POTATO LATKES

*Yield: 4-6 servings*

*Vegetarian, Gluten-Free*

#### INGREDIENTS

- 4 Yukon Gold potatoes
- 1/2 sweet onion
- 2 eggs
- 1-1/4 tsp. salt
- Canola oil for frying

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Grate the onion and potatoes into a medium-sized bowl. Add the eggs and salt and mix to combine.
2. Heat oil in a frying pan over medium-high heat. When oil is hot, drop spoonfuls of batter into the oil. Cook for 1-2 minutes on each side until outside is golden and inside is cooked through. Repeat until all batter has been fried. Serve immediately.

#### Simple Potato Latkes

*Recipe by Rachel Grossbaum*

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#### Doughnuts with Feta, Honey, and Pistachios

*Recipe by Miriam Szokovski*

Miriam Szokovski is author of the historical novel *Exiled Down Under*, and a member of the Chabad.org editorial team. She shares her love of cooking, baking, and food photography on Chabad.org's food blog, *Cook It Kosher*.

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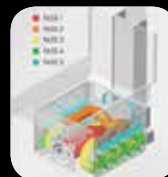
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For individuals following a modified diet, check with them and inquire about their preferences during the holiday. For those on a modified diet, there are resources available to assist in modifications of sugar, carbohydrates, protein, potassium, etc. Many healthcare organizations offer recipes with modifications to

help in allowing the individual to still enjoy their favorite foods. The Jewish Diabetes Association offers some healthy, low-carbohydrate, and low-fat Hanukkah recipes. DaVita Kidney Care offers kidney-friendly recipes for the holiday. See the Sources list for web addresses.

Most importantly, include residents in the planning of holiday meals. They can share their holiday food memories and may even have favorite recipes to use in the meals. It's all about helping them celebrate their holidays, honoring their past while also creating some new favorite memories. ■

## CE Questions | NUTRITION CONNECTION



*This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.*

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- In 2016, the American Jewish Population Project at Brandeis University estimated the U.S. Jewish population at \_\_\_\_\_ million.
  - 4.2
  - 6.2
  - 7.2
- Jewish people have lived throughout the entire world, and traditional foods and food preparation reflect the cooking styles of the various regions where they \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Farmed
  - Settled
  - Originated
- Kosher food is essentially food that does not have any non-kosher ingredients in accordance with \_\_\_\_\_ law.
  - Jewish
  - Agricultural
  - Importation
- Kosher level is indicated by a symbol printed on the food package representing an agency's certification. The four biggest kosher supervision agencies in the world originated and are headquartered in the U.S. are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - OU, KOF-K, OK, and STAR-K
  - NA, GMO, Nathan's, OJ
  - CHO, OU, OK, KJ
- Traditional foods for Hanukkah/Chanukah include:
  - Cakes, hot dogs, apple rings
  - Ice cream, hummus, wafers
  - Latkes, applesauce, Sephardic
- Individualized or “Person-Centered” care for Jews during holidays requires the same considerations as for any resident to include \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Listening, honoring choice, and independent thinking
  - Completion of the BIMS test
  - Unlimited buffet
- Kosher does not always mean traditional food, and senior living communities today are seeing \_\_\_\_\_ dishes and \_\_\_\_\_ cuisine created with kosher ingredients grow in popularity.
  - Smaller, limited
  - Fusion, modern
  - Larger, unlimited

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