"Challenging myself Jewishly with USY was a great experience! But what's next?"

BRINGING IT HOME

—KASHRUT—

A guide to bringing your experiences with Jewish practice in USY into your everyday life.

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Kashrut: Connecting the physical to the spiritual
presented by *Koach*—http://www.uscj.org/koach/kosher.htm

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What is Kashrut?

***Kashrut*, or "keeping kosher," is the system of dietary laws given to the Jews by God. It originates in the Torah and is further developed in later rabbinic literature (i.e. the Mishna, Gemarah, etc.). We keep Kosher because it is God's mandate.**

Kashrut is what we eat and how we eat it.

Why Observe Kashrut?

1. To add **spirituality** and a **connection to God** to our lives through what and how we eat.
2. To unite us with Jews around the world.
3. To act to make us special (**kadosh**).
4. To appreciate better the food we eat.
5. To promote **ethical concerns** for all of God's creatures. By keeping Kosher, we separate the animal act of getting nourishment from the human act of using reason, compassion and thought in our every action.

What makes something Kosher, anyway?

⇒ **Kosher Animals:**

- Animals which have split hooves and chew their cud (i.e. cows, sheep and even buffalo)
- Fish which have both fins AND scales.
- Most fowl, with the exception of birds of prey and ostriches.

⇒ **Specifically mentioned non-Kosher Animals:**

- Pigs, Rabbits, Insects, Birds of prey and ostriches, Shellfish (shrimp, lobster, mussels, clams, etc.), scavenger fish, and sea mammals.

⇒ ***Shechita***. This is the specific, humane manner in which meat and poultry must be slaughtered in order to minimize the animal's pain. In this process, meat must also be soaked and salted to drain it of blood.

Meat + Milk = No. Milk represents birth and life sustenance. Meat stands for flesh and death. Mixing them shows an insensitivity to life. The Torah tells us this three times (Exodus 23:19 and 34:26 and Deuteronomy 14:21) with the phrase: "Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk." Using these three basic citations, the rabbis, in later discussions, deduce three meanings for the prohibition on mixing milk and meat:

1. **Cooking** refers not only to the combining of meat and dairy foods, but also to a requirement for separate cookware and utensils to prevent the mixing of milk and meat.
2. **Eating** includes the obvious, like cheeseburgers (which are, of course, prohibited), as well as waiting between eating meat and eating dairy so that the food is digested first.

The prevailing custom in the Conservative Movement (and others) is waiting for three hours before eating dairy after eating meat. After eating most dairy products and before eating meat or fowl, some people wait half an hour, while others simply rinse their mouths.

Can I keep kosher?

Of course you can! So many people already do! Here are some easy steps to help get you on your way:

1. You can start small, by eliminating some foods from your diet—foods that mix meat and milk, pork products, shellfish, etc. If you're going to eat at a non-kosher restaurant, for example, get a hamburger instead of a cheeseburger (note that this is not truly keeping kosher, but we must start somewhere).
2. Stop eating meat (including shellfish) in non-kosher restaurants. At a non-kosher restaurant, ask about vegetarian options.
3. Start eating only Kosher meats. At your local Kosher butcher, you will probably find Beef, Veal, Chicken, Lamb (and various other meats). There's plenty to choose from!
4. Attempt to wait for a period of time before eating dairy after eating meat (start easy, with a half-hour. Then, slowly build your way up to the three-hour time-period that is the prevalent custom in the Conservative movement)
5. Start looking for and buying specifically Kosher foods. They all have a mark of Kosher certification known as a hekhsher.

Where can I find Kosher foods?

A Kosher butcher or Kosher food shop is always your best bet, but you don't necessarily need to go any further than your favorite local grocery store! Many chain grocery stores also contain Kosher meats and baked goods in them, all you have to do is ask!

- There are **thousands** of brands on the shelves which have been prepared under Rabbinic supervision. There are a number of certification marks that indicate these foods (two widely-used ones are **"O-U"** and **"Circle K"**).
- Fresh fruit and produce require no hekhsher, nor do canned or frozen fruits and vegetables which have nothing added.
- Many Rabbis in the Conservative Movement permit the eating of cheese without a hekhsher under certain circumstances. Consult your local Rabbi.
- If these are hard to find, try the health or vegetarian sections of your favorite food store.

What if I want to keep Kosher, but my family does not?

TAKE SMALL STEPS. Keeping Kosher is important, but you cannot (and should not) force your family to change just because you wish to. Talk to your parents and you will come up with a way to satisfy both your levels of observance.

Some things to try at home are:

1. Pick and choose what you are comfortable eating in a given meal. Find alternatives for things that are non-kosher such as vegetarian options.
2. Politely asking your parents to refrain from serving you non-kosher foods and non-kosher meats like Pork and Shellfish.
3. Politely asking whoever buys the groceries in your family to start buying products with hekshers (especially, if it's available, kosher meat instead of non-kosher meat).
4. Politely asking your parents to refrain from cooking with both dairy and meat at the same time.
5. Double wrapping in foil allows food to be heated in any oven and still remain kosher.

My family is ready to accommodate me. What's next?!

Kasher your kitchen! It's a fairly easy process that you can do yourself in a matter of days. For instructions on how to do this, you can consult your rabbi or go online at http://www.uscj.org/koach/kosher.htm.

Make "Kosher Friends." In Jewish tradition, eating is as much an act of personal sustenance as it is a social activity. Seek out people in your community who keep Kosher too. Invite them over for meals, go to Kosher restaurants with them, and go food shopping with them!

There are so many rules. What can I do?

When everyone else is eating without restrictions, or when that cheeseburger at the nearest fast-food restaurant seems so appealing, don't give up!

Please note that this guide is meant as a starting point in your road to keeping Kosher. Please do not treat it as an authoritative guide. Your rabbi, your Youth Director or USY advisor, or regional board members are all available to you as resources for learning, guidance and specific questions.

All of God's creatures eat to sustain their bodies. Kashrut also enables us to sustain our souls.

Places to go for more information

⇒ **Jewish Dietary Laws** by James M. Lebeau
⇒ **A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice** by Isaac Klein
⇒ **The Jewish Dietary Laws** by Samuel Dresner and Seymour Siegel

All of the above publications are available from the USCJ Book Service (www.uscj.org)

⇒ **Koach — Department of College Outreach — http://www.uscj.org/koach/kosher.htm**

B'hatzlacha! Good Luck!

Note: This pamphlet is not designed as a substitute for Jewish law. It is merely a stepping stone on your path to observing Jewish law correctly. The authoritative guide for observance should be your Rabbi.