

Agudas Achim Congregation Kashrut Policy (updated 25 April 2023)

Judaism teaches us that everything in God's world can be holy if you realize its potential holiness. Through the laws of kashrut, we sanctify the act of eating, taking the ordinary and making it holy.

Scope

The Agudas Achim Congregation (AAC) kashrut policy applies to

- All individuals and groups in the synagogue
- Everywhere on the synagogue's premises, including the sukkah
- Food to be shared communally

This policy does not apply to preschool lunches in classrooms or employee lunches. (These lunches must be vegetarian.)

When Questions Arise

As the resident Halakhic authority (*mara d'atra*) of AAC, Rabbi Steven Rein rules on kashrut questions for our facility.

Synagogue Kitchen

All food that enters the kitchen must bear an accepted *heksher* (see <http://www.kashrut.com/agencies> for a list of accepted symbols). Only prepared foods from a caterer or restaurant under rabbinic supervision can be brought into the kitchen (see <http://www.capitolk.org/kashrus.html> for a list of kosher caterers and restaurants in metro-Washington). No food made in a private home can enter the kitchen.

No one may prepare food in the kitchen (other than the kitchen manager and trained staff members with prior approval) without direct supervision of one of our certified *Mashgihim* (kashrut supervisors).

Standards for Raw Ingredients and Processed Foods

1. The following ingredients are kosher without certification: Fresh fruits (checked for bugs), fresh vegetables (checked for bugs), eggs (checked for blood spots), milk, salt, sugar, flour, pure spices, unflavored tea, unflavored coffee, beer, raw grains beans and rice, raw nuts or nut flour, and pure olive oil.
2. All meat products must come from a kosher butcher under rabbinic supervision, as approved by the rabbi.
3. Fresh fish (kosher species having fins and scales, excluding swordfish and sturgeon) does not require rabbinic supervision, but must be rinsed thoroughly before being cooked.

4. Because processed foods must both contain kosher ingredients and be prepared in a kosher way, all prepared or packaged food (including canned, frozen, baked, or foods otherwise changed from their natural state) as well as dairy products (cheeses, yogurts, etc.) must bear kashrut certification from a recognized authority. If there is doubt as to a particular symbol or kashrut authority, the rabbi will give final approval.
5. Only wines, grape juices, and grape products (except fresh grapes) with a kashrut certification may be used.

Food Served by the Synagogue

All food served by the synagogue (i.e. kiddushes, life-cycle events, parties, synagogue programs) must be prepared in their entirety either in AAC's kitchen or by a commercial establishment under rabbinic supervision.

Prior approval by AAC is required of all caterers. If the kitchen is needed, on-site supervision by a *mashgiach* (a kashrut supervisor trained for that role) is required.

Passover Rules

On Passover, no food cooked in any private home may be brought into AAC. Only sealed and packaged food and drinks with kashrut certification from a rabbinic supervisor may be brought into the building. This applies to staff as well. Consult annual Rabbinical Assembly Pesah Guide for additional details.

Agudas Achim Congregation Shared Meal (Potluck) Policy

A Note about Shared Meals

The rules articulated below are designed to enhance community members' sense of belonging and their ability to contribute to communal meals. Although our community is comprised of some who keep kosher and others who do not, we want everyone to feel comfortable eating at AAC. We also want those who do not keep kosher to be able to contribute food to share at designated potluck meals.

AAC is a *kehilah kedoshah*, a sacred community, and this involves the trust that all of our members are willing to observe these policies, no matter what their personal level of observance may be, so that any member of the community can feel comfortable eating in our building.

Individuals who want to join a community potluck and are unable to eat food prepared by others are invited to bring their own food for personal consumption.

All ingredients used must be certified as kosher. Of course, packaged food that is certified kosher may also be used.

When there is a potluck meal, the kitchen will be closed. Food cannot be stored in the kitchen (including refrigerators and/or freezers). There is a refrigerator that CAN be used in the storage room. In an ideal world, all food would arrive prior to shabbat (and those who would like to bring their food prior to shabbat may do so). As we prioritize the value of shared communal meals, food brought on shabbat is permitted.

When there is a potluck meal, a separate table or serving area will be designated to be used only for packaged food that is certified kosher. The table will be clearly marked as restricted for such certified packaged foods.

When there is a potluck meal, all food prepared outside AAC, whether from a kosher home or non-kosher home, will be accompanied by a list of ingredients clearly displayed adjacent to the served item. This is to accommodate those with food allergies or sensitivities as recommended by the AAC Inclusion Committee.

Preparing Food in Kosher Homes

Dairy and pareve food prepared in homes that keep kosher according to AAC's definition (see below) may be brought into AAC for private or group consumption (potluck).

Preparing Food in Non-Kosher Homes

Option 1:

Prepare a cold salad (including tuna salad) or fruit salad with utensils and serving pieces that have been washed thoroughly. Please ensure that neither the salad or dressing includes any spicity (*charif*)

ingredients, like onions and garlic. If you would like to use this kind of ingredient, use a new and/or disposable knife and cutting surface.

Option 2:

Use pots, pans and utensils that have not been used for at least 24 hours and ensure that all ingredients are certified kosher. Any dairy or parve item can now be prepared.

Option 3:

Kasher the pots and utensils (see below) used for preparing food and ensure that all ingredients are certified kosher. Any dairy or parve item can now be prepared.

Commercial Establishments

The rules above apply only to private homes and are designed to build community. The rules do not apply to restaurants, delis and caterers. No non-kosher restaurant or caterer meets AAC's kashrut standards and it is impermissible to bring cooked food of any kind from a non-kosher restaurant or caterer into the facility. This includes cheese pizza from non-kosher establishments and fish or vegetarian food cooked at otherwise non-kosher restaurants. The same rule applies to non-certified bagels and breads purchased from restaurants that also sell shellfish and/or non-kosher meat.

Bottom line: Commercially prepared cooked food may be brought into AAC only if it is prepared under rabbinic supervision.

When Is Kashrut Certification Required?

All foods brought into AAC for communal meals require a recognized kashrut symbol, such as the O-U, Star-K, Kaf-K, and Triangle-K (a non-exhaustive list of common certification symbols can be found at www.kashrut.com/agencies/) A simple "K" usually is not sufficient, although for some products, like Kellogg's cereals, a "K" is backed up by a recognized supervisor). The Tablet K *heksher* is also not recognized by the Conservative movement as reliable and may not be used. See below for details about baked goods, fish, wine, and cheese.

Similarly, many types of ingredients used in home-cooked food that is brought into AAC from kosher homes require certification. In general, processed and cooked foods, meaning, those with additives and those whose ingredients are of unclear provenance, need certification.

The following foods do not require certification:

- Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, including those cut up by grocery stores.
- Dry grains, legumes and beans
- Dried fruit
- Dry-roasted nuts and nuts still in the shell (oil-roasted nuts require certification)
- Honey

- Olives
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Milk
- Coffee and tea at any restaurant (This applies both to coffee and tea purchased for your own preparation and prepared coffee purchased from an otherwise non-Kosher restaurant, since the urns used for hot water and coffee handle only this item.)
- Certified vegan processed foods, such as those bearing the “V” symbol of Vegan Action, or Vegan.org. While kashrut laws are not the same as vegan strictures, and it is therefore unwise to confuse the two, in practice, vegan products are probably acceptable to every AAC member and may be brought into the facility to share with others.

Note: This list is not exhaustive. When you are uncertain about whether a food needs certification, please consult Rabbi Rein.

Baked Goods

Ideally, breads and other baked goods should be purchased from bakeries under rabbinic supervision. Non-certified baked goods (i.e. Great Harvest) may be brought into AAC if they have been purchased from bakeries which do not sell or use meat or shellfish products; do not use pre-mixed dough, icings or other products; and use only kosher ingredients and products (butter, vegetable oils) to grease their pans.

If you purchase commercially baked bread that lacks kashrut certification, please determine if it is pareve or dairy and mark accordingly. Note: many of the breads from Great Harvest are dairy and ALL of their breads are made using dairy equipment.

Fish

Fresh or smoked fish of a kosher species, meaning one with fins and scales (no shellfish, swordfish, or sturgeon), may be purchased at any market. If the fish must be sliced, please make sure that the knife used has been wiped clean beforehand. A list of kosher species can be found at www.kashrut.com/articles/fish/.

Wine

Only wine that is certified kosher may be used.

Cheese

All cheese must be certified as kosher.

Food Must Not Be Purchased or Prepared in Violation of Shabbat or Holidays

Food brought into AAC may not be cooked or purchased on Shabbat or purchased on the first and final days of Pesach and Sukkot or on Rosh HaShanna and Shavuot. Jewish law does allow cooking on these holidays, when they do not fall on Shabbat, so you may cook, but not shop, on a holiday morning and bring the food to AAC to share that same day.

Kashering Equipment

Oven: Clean out the oven and turn on the highest heat for one hour, or run the self-clean cycle.

Stovetop: Clean the stovetop and then turn your burners on to their highest setting for several minutes.

Microwave: Clean the microwave, fill a bowl with water, and put it in the microwave for one minute on the highest setting so that the water boils.

Pots and pans: Fill a large pot with water and bring it to a boil, then drop the item you wish to kasher by putting it into the boiling water and completely immersing it for at least 15 seconds. If the pot or pan to be kasher is too big to submerge in another pot, fill it with water to the very top and boil the water. Heat a large stone or other piece of metal. Using a pair of tongs, put the stone or heated metal into the pot causing the water to overflow the top of the pot.

Utensils: If the utensil is entirely metal, fill a large pot with water and bring it to a boil, then drop the utensil you wish to kasher by putting it into the boiling water and completely immersing it for at least 15 seconds.

Definition of a Kosher Home

While it is true that different households practice kashrut as they see fit, for the purposes of AAC's communal kashrut policy, the following practices constitute having a kosher home.

Exclusively kosher foods are brought into the home:

- All meat and poultry is purchased from kosher butchers or is prepackaged and has rabbinic certification.
- Only kosher fish, i.e. fish with fins and scales, is brought into the home. Shellfish and eels are not kosher. A list of kosher and non-kosher species can be found on the internet www.kashrut.com/articles/fish/.
- All packaged, canned, and frozen products are certified kosher or have been checked to make sure they contain no non-kosher ingredients. Note: it is best not to rely on the kosher-by-ingredient approach, although homes that do may still be considered kosher.
- Commercially cooked food comes from establishments under rabbinic supervision.
- Commercially baked goods come from establishments under rabbinic supervision.

Eggs are checked for blood spots and if spots are found, the eggs are discarded. Note: While critical for “free-range” and organic eggs, checking even regular “factory eggs” is advised, although not required.

Meat and dairy dishes, pots, pans, utensils and flatware are stored and used separately in the kitchen:

- Separate dishes, pots, pans, utensils and flatware are used for meat and dairy foods. Utensils that become non-kosher are properly kashered.
- Meat and dairy dishes, pots, utensils, and flatware are washed separately using separate sponges. Meat and dairy dishes are never washed together in the dishwasher.
- Products used with meat, including those labeled "non-dairy," are checked to be sure they are pareve.