

# Halal and Kosher

## Common Practices Shared

*by Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD*

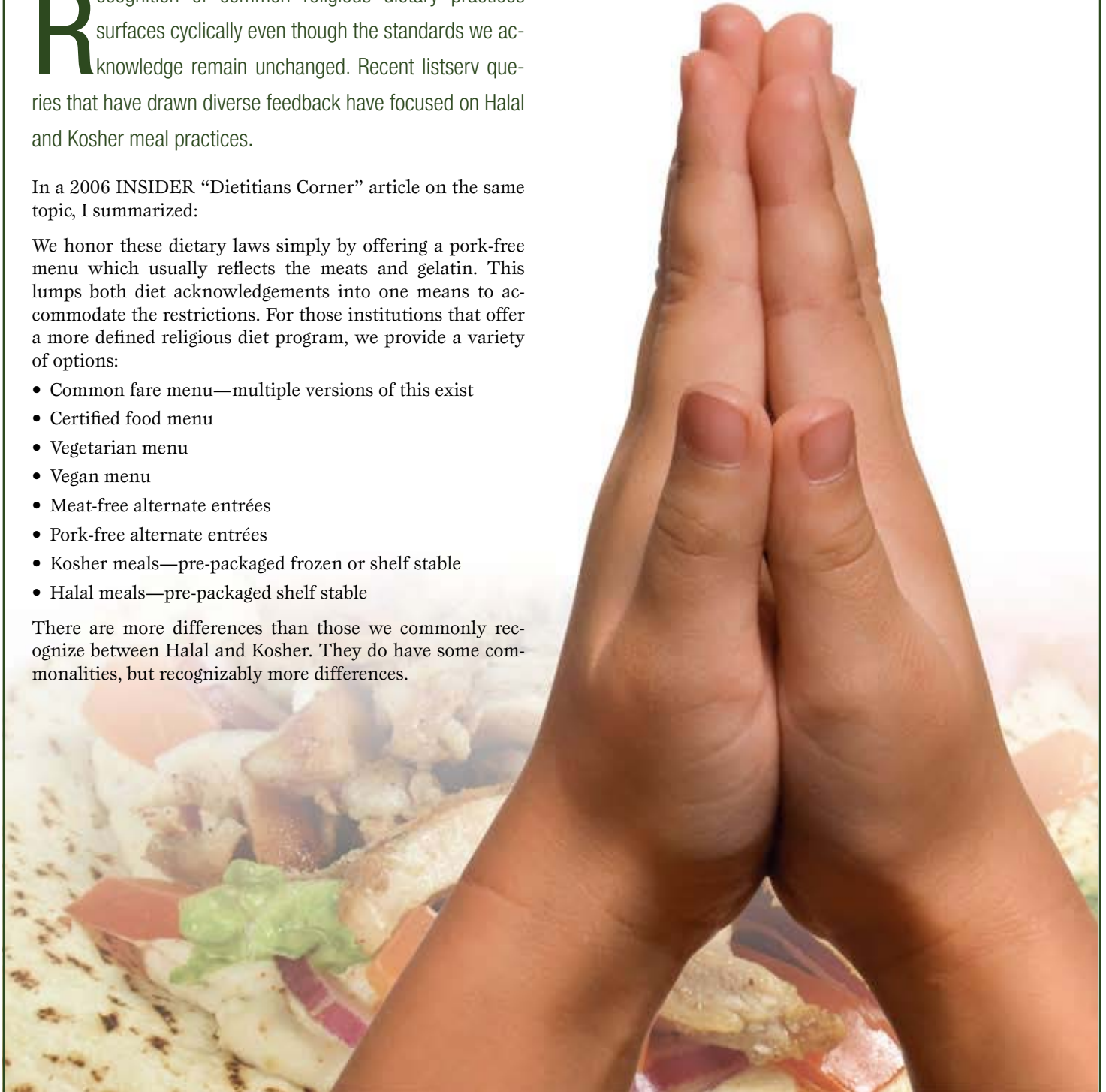
**R**ecognition of common religious dietary practices surfaces cyclically even though the standards we acknowledge remain unchanged. Recent listserv queries that have drawn diverse feedback have focused on Halal and Kosher meal practices.

In a 2006 INSIDER “Dietitians Corner” article on the same topic, I summarized:

We honor these dietary laws simply by offering a pork-free menu which usually reflects the meats and gelatin. This lumps both diet acknowledgements into one means to accommodate the restrictions. For those institutions that offer a more defined religious diet program, we provide a variety of options:

- Common fare menu—multiple versions of this exist
- Certified food menu
- Vegetarian menu
- Vegan menu
- Meat-free alternate entrées
- Pork-free alternate entrées
- Kosher meals—pre-packaged frozen or shelf stable
- Halal meals—pre-packaged shelf stable

There are more differences than those we commonly recognize between Halal and Kosher. They do have some commonalities, but recognizably more differences.



## Halal and Kosher Commonalities

- Kosher is similar in meaning to Halal in the context of food only. Halal also refers to the lawful way of life.
- No pork consumption.
- Certification and processing must be authenticated to be labeled Halal or Kosher. The slaughtering process is done by hand with a sharp knife in a specified manner by someone specially trained to slaughter.

Below are excerpts of recent queries and responses (representing 12 states) from the Corrections Dietitian's listservs regarding Halal and Kosher practices.

### Queries

*What do facilities that do not use pre-packaged Halal or Kosher meals serve when they have inmates who need Halal or Kosher diets?*

*If they serve vegetarian diets, do they have separate cooking equipment to prepare the food?*

*If they do not have a separate kitchen, did they ever have any lawsuits?*

*Do turkey and chicken have to be Halal to be served to inmates? One RD said only beef had to be Halal?*

There is a difference in the way animals are killed in each respective religion and so meat for a Kosher diet cannot be served on a Halal diet. There are also the utensils used to prepare the meals (whether pork-free or vegetarian to comply) to consider... *Is this information still true or does it depend on the Imam?*

### Responses (Identified by state, but not jurisdiction)

#### Massachusetts

Until recently, we have never had a request for kosher meals... the county recently started getting frozen kosher meals.

...used to purchase Halal foods and then prepare them in our kitchen. Since we had an imam sign off on the menu, we were covered.

...use pre-packaged Kosher meals for Jewish inmates. The Alternative/Vegetarian Diet consists of a combination of dehydrated products and various other non-meat items such as soy-based meat analogs. Currently, we do not use a separate kitchen or separate utensils to prepare these meals.

...lawsuits are pending with regard to religious diets...Muslims are requesting Halal meat twice daily. Currently, we provide Halal meat twice a year during the Eid Feasts.

#### Washington

...only beef (which is the only red meat on the menu) had to be Halal.

#### Michigan

...does not serve Halal meals; it has separate kitchens/work areas used exclusively for Kosher meals.

#### Louisiana

...we have very few Kosher requests...I speak to the inmate and offer what we have that is Kosher.

Modified preparation and serving:

- Prepared chicken in aluminum foil in the oven and had the Kosher inmate remove the foil and give it to the deputy.
- Served three boiled eggs in the shell as a protein entrée. Tuna was kosher.
- Advised the inmate that kosher tuna, kosher vegetables in cans, frozen vegetables, canned kosher fruits, and fresh fruits and vegetables were available.
- Breakfast = peanut butter or boiled eggs, kosher boxed cereal or p/c instant oatmeal packets.
- All fruit juice cartons were used except *no grape juice*.
- Milk was sent with every meal along with the milk alternative.
- Double rice and vegetables with margarine (kosher).
- All meals were sent in styro trays with plastic spoon.
- Frozen vegetables were cooked in styro tray in the microwave oven.

#### Colorado

...implemented a Halal diet as a result of litigation in November 2005.

...serve a pork-free main population menu to keep Halal diet as simple as possible, avoiding special trays, special preparation measures, etc.

...operating under the assumption that poultry slaughtered in the United States is Halal. In the lawsuit, the inmate involved stated that he didn't have a problem with the poultry items we served and during the trial it was established to the judge's satisfaction that our alternate meal program (free of meat and poultry entrées and by-products) afforded the inmates a Halal option.

...at trial, "the inmate successfully argued that it was his sincerely held belief that he must have some beef in his diet. Since our beef is not Halal, the judge found in his favor."

...simple approach to providing Halal diets that meet the requirements of the findings in the lawsuit...those on a Halal diet go through the regular line and receive either the regular entrée or they can ask for the alternate meal option...those approved for a Halal diet get a special tray a few times per week when beef is the main entrée. Their tray contains a Halal beef patty in place of the beef entrée.

**Practices to accommodate religious dietary laws continue to vary across the country...** Listed here are the responses from recent queries from the Corrections Dietitian's listservs regarding Halal and Kosher practices.

**Delaware**

...pre-packed frozen meals served to authorized Orthodox Jewish faith...of 8,000 offenders statewide, we only have four.

Offenders requiring a vegetarian diet for non-medical reasons must make their requests through the chaplain's office.

Halal meals are not provided for at this time and we presently have a lawsuit in on providing Halal meals.

**Montana**

Our facility is small and old enough that it does not have its own kitchen. Meals are sent in from the county rest home...we fit into a "reasonable accommodations" clause under Montana law. Thus, we follow some Kosher/Halal stipulations, i.e. no pork, but cannot accommodate all of the specifics. Because the meals are prepared off-site, we can request, but can't guarantee, that even separate cookware is used.

**Wisconsin**

We purchase Kosher entrées...per our Department of Justice, it's not reasonable to expect us to have a Kosher kitchen.

Our Halal policy is still in development, but will not involve the pre-prepared sealed entrées...we will begin serving Halal beef patties in June 2008.

**New York**

We prepare all Halal meals, approximately 6,500, using dedicated equipment in our kitchens.

...Jewish inmates are served Kosher (prepared) dinners.

**California**

Halal meals are pre-packaged.

**Georgia**

Inmates can choose from the following options under the Alternative Entrée Program...a complete vegan program:

- Vegan
- Restricted vegan (which follows the Sabbath guidelines)
- Pork waive off with the vegan main entrée substitute only

At each of five sites...separate kitchens, where food is prepared for the Vegan and Restricted Vegan program...also have a separate serving line, specific color trays, and cups, etc., that are just used for those programs.

The Pork Waive-off vegan entrée is prepared in the main kitchen and served on the regular serving line—no special trays or cups for this option. Most participants are on the Pork Waive-off with the vegan substitute, next would be Vegan, and then the fewest number on the Restricted Vegan.

Our plan is to provide the Pork Waive-off with the vegan substitute statewide, as well as add at least one more site that will provide the Vegan and Restricted Vegan program along with the Pork Waive-off.

...we have not had any lawsuits since we implemented the program.

**Pennsylvania**

...provide a Kosher diet to those inmates who are approved...consists of a cold bag meal, somewhat monotonous. The United

States Court of Appeals, Third Circuit, held that Kosher food provided to inmates was not required to be hot...in direct response to litigation a number of years ago. The bag meals are prepared following specific guidelines in the same kitchen as mainline foods.

To date, Kosher diets have only been approved for Jewish inmates.

...we have not yet been challenged to provide Halal meats.

...offer a vegan entrée choice at midday and evening meal, and a few other non-entrée items on the menu that may contain dairy and/or eggs. These foods are clearly identified.

Vegetarian foods are prepared using the same cooking equipment as mainline foods.

...anticipate implementing a totally vegetarian (no animal products) diet in the near future.

**New Jersey**

We use a "vegetarian Kosher frozen meal" for all Kosher inmates.

One facility serves Kosher...has a separate place in the kitchen to cook it all and two separate places for storage—one in the freezer and one in the storeroom.

**Summary**

Practices to accommodate religious dietary laws continue to vary across the country depending on jurisdiction, demographics, logistics, and litigation.

I would like to thank all of the participants in this discussion who shared their agencies' practices, making this article possible.

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**Meetings and Announcements****NCHC Spring Conference**

Updates in Correctional Health Care  
May 17-20, 2008  
San Antonio, TX  
[www.nchc.org](http://www.nchc.org)

**ACFSA International Conference**

August 24-28, 2008  
Charleston, SC  
Dietitians in Corrections Networking Luncheon  
Details to be announced!

Past Dietitian's Corner articles may be viewed on the ACFSA website, [www.acfsa.org](http://www.acfsa.org).

**Membership Information**

If you would like to be added to the Dietitians in Corrections networking EML (electronic mailing list), please email me directly at [bwakeen@neo.rr.com](mailto:bwakeen@neo.rr.com). This is an informal discussion group and your name/email address will be listed in each email sent to the group. You *do not* have to be a dietitian to be part of this listserv.