

FOOD AND MEALS

For most Pakistanis, eating is a great passion; people don't eat to live, but rather they live to eat. Pakistani food is noticeably different than the fare you find in a typical "American style" restaurant or diner in the United States. The spicy, flavorful chapatis, curries, lentils, biryani rice, and meat kebabs are all traditional staples of Pakistani meals. Many of the spices and dishes are similar to those found in neighboring India, though meat plays a more dominant role in Pakistani cuisine.

The YES Host Family Handbook and YES Cultural Handbook contain detailed explanations of the important Muslim dietary requirements. The following section addresses both Muslim and non-Muslim Pakistani dietary habits. Remember, as always, each student is different, and food is a cultural difference that can cause extreme homesickness, so treat this subject with care.



Talk to your student about what foods s/he will or will not eat. They are aware of the differences between common American and Pakistani foods, and will be prepared to adapt to the cuisine/foods found in your home and community. Pakistani parents will appreciate your desire to have a healthy and nutritious diet for their child.

Halal foods

Muslim students follow the Halal laws governing the preparation of meat: meat must be butchered and prepared in a certain way and pork products may not be consumed or come into contact with other food. Be aware that foods like jellybeans, marshmallows, and other gelatin-based foods typically contain pork byproducts and are not considered Halal. If possible, find out if halal meat is available in your area before the student arrives. Many U.S. American communities will not have halal meat available. In these cases, kosher meat is an acceptable substitute as the preparation laws are the same. Many Pakistani students are also prepared to follow a vegetarian diet in the event that halal or kosher meat is unavailable.



Make a commitment to limiting and/or not consuming pork products while hosting. This helps to demonstrate your sensitivity to the student's religious beliefs and being accepting of their religion.

– U.S. Host Family

In some cases, available halal or kosher meat options may be pricey, and students are prepared that they must be flexible. However, as meat is widely consumed in Pakistan, it is likely that your student will appreciate a splurge of a halal meat meal every once in a while.

Although the restrictions concerning meat are the issues that will most likely pertain to your student, there are other food laws in Islam, including the prohibition against consuming alcohol. Although students under 21 are subject to alcohol restrictions anyway, be aware that the Muslim restriction on alcohol includes, for example, a wine-based pasta sauce. Even products like vanilla extract and toothpaste can contain alcohol! Food containing blood or blood byproducts, such as blood sausage, are also prohibited by Muslim dietary law.



Her application said she must eat halal food, but after she arrived she decided that she wanted to be part of 'American teenage life' and eat fast food including McDonald's hamburgers, etc. She was still very careful not to eat any pork or pork products.

– U.S. Host Family