

Halal Diet Considerations for Muslim Students

What is “Halal?” The word “halal” means “lawful.” It is equivalent to the term “kosher” in Judaism. Halal is often mentioned when discussing what you eat and drink. Since what you eat affects both the body and the spirit, the teachings of Islam prohibit substances that harm either. There are two types of prohibitions: 1) the food itself and 2) theological reasons.

When a Muslim student asks for halal food, essentially it means that the food contains no pork or alcohol and that the meat has been slaughtered according to the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed and the name of Allah has been mentioned at the time of slaughtering. Foods that are not halal are considered “haram” or “unlawful.”

Be aware. Many popular U.S. American foods are made with pork products: for example, sausage, hot dogs, baked beans and potato salad. Foods like jellybeans, marshmallows, and other gelatin-based foods also typically contain pork by-products and are not considered Halal. Even products like vanilla extract and toothpaste can contain alcohol!

Muslims will generally not eat meat that has also come in contact with pork. For example, they might not eat pizza with pepperoni taken off the top, a meal with ham taken out, or pasta cooked with wine. If avoiding pork and alcohol is important to your student, it is best to have him/her read the labels carefully. Some Muslims may also avoid eating seafood, so it is important to communicate with your student to understand what they are comfortable eating.

- **Host families are not required to provide halal meat for their student.** Helping your student obtain halal meat for special occasions/holidays is a meaningful way to recognize their values.
- **Talk with your student** about his or her religious food practices, food preferences and restrictions, and how he or she follows these practices. Most Muslim students are aware that halal meat is not always available in some parts of the U.S., and they are responsible for adapting accordingly which may include preparing their own vegetarian options. If you and/or your student are unsure about whether a food item is Halal, Imam Arafat is available to provide advice. Ask your AR or SSM to connect you.
- **Use resources** such as a local mosque <https://www.halaltrip.com/> and www.zabihah.com to find out if halal meat is available in your area. Some grocery stores stock frozen halal meat, chicken nuggets and other products. Halal meat can even be ordered online.
- **Embrace alternatives.** Kosher meat is an acceptable substitute as the preparation laws are the same. Turkey is also an easy alternative to many pork products, such as bacon and pepperoni. Many students are prepared to follow a vegetarian diet in the event that halal or kosher meat is unavailable. If your student has not shared any dietary restrictions prior to arrival, plan on serving vegetarian options the first few days until you and your student have a chance to discuss any dietary requirements.



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Celebrating Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and one of the most important months for Muslims. During Ramadan, Muslims generally do not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. This is done so to remember how the less fortunate go through on a daily basis and are encouraged to help them to the best of their ability.

Ramadan is followed by Eid-ul-Fitr. Eid is a three day long celebration where friends and family exchange presents or Eidi (a small amount of money paid to the kids by the elders in the family). During this time your student may experience intensified homesickness. He or she will likely be pleased if members of the family decide to fast with him or her for a day or two during Ramadan or to simply have breakfast with them before dawn.

Students will be up early before sunrise to have breakfast. Back home, this is a meal that is sometimes shared with friends or families. It will be helpful to have foods prepared and stored in the refrigerator for your student to eat before sunrise.

Celebrate Eid by making a special meal and inviting over family and friends to observe the end of Ramadan or encourage your student to cook a traditional meal.



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