

Dietary requirements and faith in schools.

Some religions or beliefs have specific dietary requirements and therefore needs. Schools will wish to accommodate these needs in order to ensure that pupils and staff belonging to these faiths are able to keep healthy, secure in the fact that they are not compromising their beliefs.

Baha'is do not have specific dietary prohibitions. Some may be vegetarians, but this is of their own choosing, and not a religious requirement. Baha'is do not drink alcohol, except when prescribed by a physician. Smoking is discouraged but not forbidden.

The Baha'i period of fasting is 2nd March – 21st March. It occurs at the same time each year. Baha'is may not take food or drink between sunrise and sunset during this period. Fasting is not obligatory in sickness, pregnancy, menstruation, nursing mothers, people under the age of 15 and over 70.

Many **Buddhists** are vegetarian or vegan. Some may have taken a precept which involves eating only one main meal a day. This is usually eaten before midday.

In some Buddhist traditions on certain days, possibly Full Moon days, fasting may be observed. There are also other festival days such as Buddha's birthday, death day, his enlightenment, the first Sermon and others.

Jehovah's Witnesses, in harmony with their scriptural beliefs (Acts 15:28,29), are required to abstain from eating blood, ie blood sausage, and from animal meat if the blood has not been properly drained. Apart from this there is no restriction on what is to be eaten, and fasting is not carried out.

For **Hindus** Sraavan is the month of fasting (July/ August) and some individuals may choose to fast at different times during this month. Many Hindus will refrain from consuming grain.

Amongst Hindus, food and its preparation are linked with concepts of purity and pollution. These in turn are linked with the concept of caste in which the priestly caste (Brahmin) is thought to be the most pure and therefore in most danger of being polluted. In general, Brahmins (of which there are several sub-types) are permitted to eat food that is prepared by the members of their own caste and the untouchables, being the most polluted can eat anything. However these restrictions depend on the orthodoxy of the individual family

Most Hindus, and especially women, are happier with a vegetarian diet although they will eat fish, chicken, lamb or egg dishes. Some may choose not to eat eggs (Vegan). There are no restrictions on how the slaughter has to take place. Dairy products are acceptable so long as they are free of animal fats.

Beef is never eaten as the cow is considered to be a sacred animal and dairy products are considered to be auspicious. In modern times and amongst non-caste Hindus, pork will be taken but this is rare.

Meat or fish or even eggs will not be consumed at all on special days which are dependent on the phases of the moon. Hindus follow a lunar calendar which is different from the Islamic lunar calendar. On such days, there may be restrictions on the type of food eaten, whether it is cooked or not or whether it is prepared in a certain way. At such times, milk and yogurt, fresh fruit and certain vegetables such as potato or sweet potato may be consumed. Certain foods, such as sago cooked in milk or coconut milk are also permitted.

Jews will only eat meat which is killed and prepared by their own religious-trained personnel (Kosher or permitted). This process ensures that as much blood as possible is drained from the meat before it is prepared and cooked, by soaking and salting it for some time.

Jews who are observant will not take milk and meat in the same meal and will generally wait three hours between these kinds of foods. (Some people wait six hours; others only one). A Jewish household will keep meat and milk utensils, crockery and cutlery rigidly separate.

Orthodox Jews use food which is rabbinically certified to be free of meat or shell-fish derivatives. Many seemingly innocuous items contain meat products, such as rennet in cheese, or gelatine in jellies and yogurts. Many Jews therefore refuse any food which is not certified, including milk and cheese; they will also not regard product labelling as reliable evidence, since often different products are produced using the same equipment.

Most Jews will eat eggs and some fish. Only fish with fins and scales are permitted. There are prohibitions on shellfish and fish without fins and scales, such as eel and shark. However, many religious Jews will simply not eat any food prepared in the school kitchen

Mormons are health-conscious. They are not usually vegetarians but will eat meat sparingly, avoiding products with much blood. There is concern over the effects of stimulants, including caffeine, and Mormons drink neither tea nor coffee. Some will avoid all hot drinks. In schools water, milk or fruit juice will be acceptable. Alcohol and tobacco are forbidden.

Muslims are permitted to eat halal food and drink only. Halal means lawful. Islamic law requires that Allah's name is invoked at the time of slaying of an animal for food. (Note: fish and eggs are Halal). Muslims are not permitted to eat haram food and drink. Haram means unlawful. This includes the meat of animals not slain in the prescribed manner. Other things that are haram are alcohol, pig meat products and lard. The diets of different cultures within Islam vary.

Sikhs do not eat beef, some will eat other meat. Eggs and fish may also be excluded. However Sikhs who have taken the amrit (holy water), have vowed never to touch, cook or eat any kind of meat. They will not eat any food cooked in school as they will only eat food prepared by their own family because they will be sure it will not have been alongside meat of any description. Sikhs do not eat Muslim's Halal meat. Some Sikhs may wish to fast if there is a full moon.

If staff or pupils bring food into school that has been chosen to meet the requirements of their religion, they may need to store and heat this food separately from other food. As an example Muslims and Jews will wish to ensure their food is not in contact with pork or anything that may have been in contact with pork, such as cloths or sponges. These members of the school community would therefore value being able to ensure that their food does not become contaminated by 'unclean' foods or items.

As beliefs and practices vary between and within faith communities it is good practice to consult members of the relevant faith communities on such issues and find a mutually acceptable solution to any dietary problems.

Good Practice Example: A teacher who, for religious reasons, is a vegetarian felt unable to store her lunch in a refrigerator next to the meat sandwiches belonging to a colleague. Following consultation with the staff and their representatives, a policy was introduced that all food must be stored in sealed containers and shelves were separately designated 'meat'

and 'vegetarian'. This arrangement on this occasion met the needs of all staff at no cost to the employer.

Good Practice Example: A school decides to ban all pork products in order to cater for the needs of staff and pupils who are not permitted contact with these for religious reasons. This includes all processed foods and cooking materials.