

Understanding Halal Foods

Toronto is a diverse city with people from many cultures and religions. Muslims practise the religion of Islam. Muslims follow certain Islamic dietary laws, which define foods and beverages as either Halal (permitted) or Haram (not permitted). The information in this guide helps you identify acceptable foods for Muslims.

Haram foods (not permitted by Islam)

Haram foods (not permitted)	Specific examples of Haram foods/ingredients	Products where you may find these Haram foods/ingredients
Pork and all its by-products (anything made from pork)	Pork, ham, bacon	Canned beans, deli meats, frozen dinners, processed foods, soups, Caesar salad, salad dressings
	Lard	Bread, crackers, pies, baked products
	Pepsin ¹	Cheese, yogurt
Non-Zabihah meat (Zabihah is a process of slaughtering animals according to Islamic dietary laws)	Chicken or beef that has not been slaughtered according to Islamic dietary laws; meat that is not certified as Halal	Meat dishes, prepared foods
Other by-products that come from pork or non-Zabihah meat	Animal shortening	Baked products, desserts
	Broth	Soups, sauces
	Rennet ¹	Cheese
	Gelatin ²	Desserts, candy, baked goods, ice cream, pudding, yogurt
Alcohol (ethanol) and foods containing alcohol ³	All alcoholic drinks e.g. wine, beer, etc.	Desserts, some packaged foods
	Pure or artificial vanilla extract/essence ⁴	Baked products, desserts, candies, yogurt

See footnotes on page 2

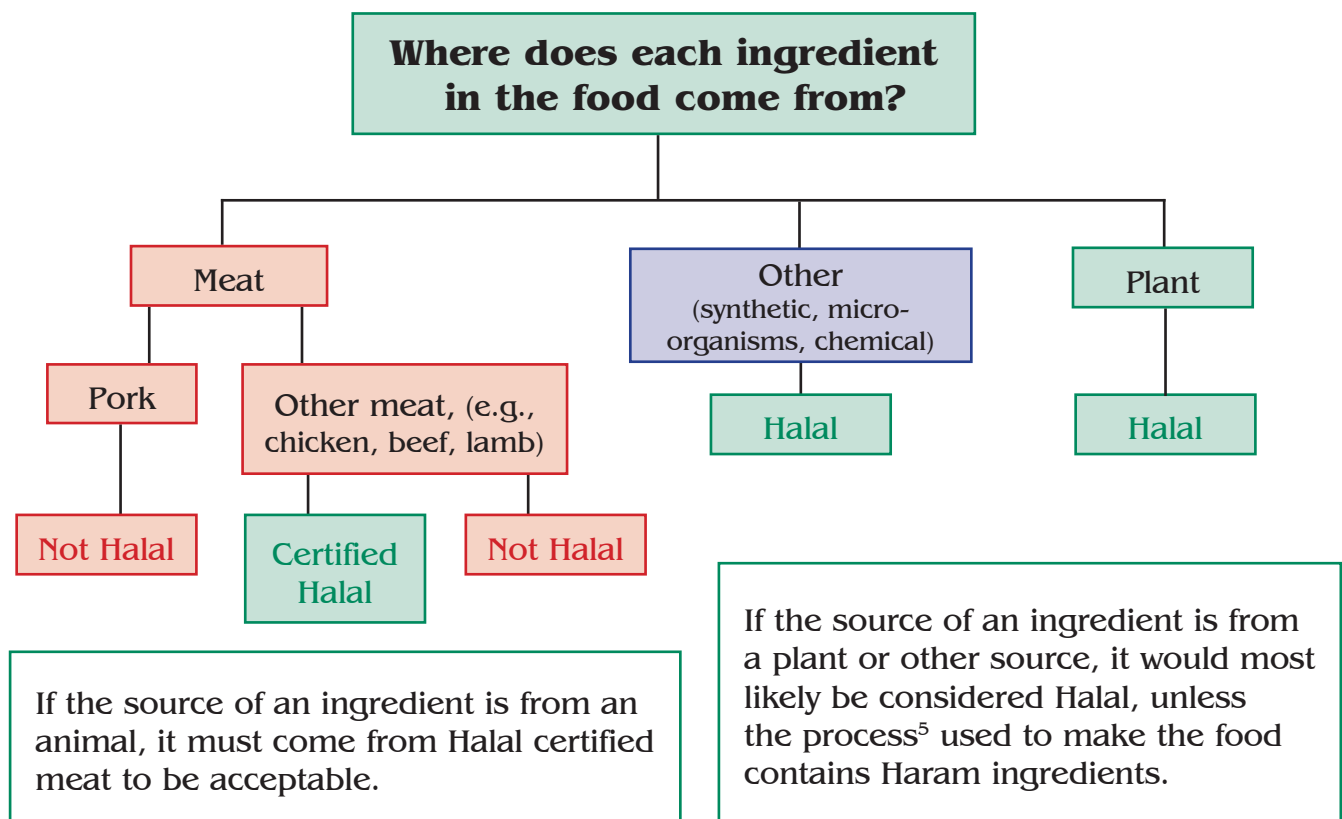
Halal foods (permitted by Islam)

Any food is Halal as long as it does not contain or come into contact with any of the Haram ingredients shown on the first page. For example, yogurt is Halal but not if it contains gelatin as one of the ingredients.

How do you know if a food is Halal?

Sometimes it's not clear. Each ingredient in a food must be Halal for the food to be considered Halal. Some ingredients can cause confusion because it is not easy to identify the source of certain ingredients in packaged foods, such as sodium stearoyl-lactylate or lipase. Consumers can ask for more information from the food company.

The question to ask of food companies is: Where does each ingredient in the food come from?



Footnotes

- 1 Pepsin and rennet are Haram (not permitted). Microbial enzyme can be used instead of pepsin and rennet; microbial enzyme is Halal.
- 2 Fish gelatin is Halal.
- 3 Despite their name, sugar alcohols such as sorbitol and mannitol do not contain ethanol. Most of them are Halal but it is best to check this with the food company.
- 4 Most flavour agents such as vanilla extract/essence are Haram (not permitted) because alcohol is used in their production. However, if there is no more than 0.1% ethanol in the final product, then it is considered acceptable. Also, powdered vanilla is Halal.
- 5 There could be processing aids that may contain Haram ingredients, such as gelatin or certain enzymes. Note that the food label will not have processing aid information on it. That is why it is important to call the food company and/or look for proof of Halal certification by a Halal certifying organization.

What is an ingredient list?

An ingredient list shows all of the ingredients in a packaged food. Ingredients are listed in order of weight, beginning with the ingredient that weighs the most and ending with the ingredient that weighs the least. An ingredient list must be on every food package.

Ingredients to check

This chart lists some common ingredients that could be Haram. The list is not complete – these are just some common examples. Contact the food company to check the source.

Example of an ingredient list for yogurt



Ingredients to check	What to check for	Common sources of these ingredients	Foods where this ingredient is commonly found
Artificial/natural flavour	Need to determine whether an animal derived ingredient or alcohol was used to make the flavour	Varied	Wide variety of packaged foods
L-cysteine	Need to determine the source of the L-cysteine, if the source is human hair it is Haram (not permitted)	Human hair	Bakery products
Lipase	From plant sources, these ingredients are Halal, but from animal sources they are Haram (not permitted)	Pork	Cheese, processed cheese, products containing cheese or yogurt
Mono and diglycerides		Pork, non-Zabihah beef	Bread, baked products, processed foods, animal shortening and some margarines
Sodium stearoyl-lactylate		Pork, non-Zabihah beef	Bakery products
Whey	If rennet is used to make whey, the whey is Haram (not permitted). If microbial enzyme is used instead of rennet, the whey is Halal.	Cheese by-product	Cheese, crackers and many other packaged foods

Frequently asked questions

How do you know whether meat is Halal?

- As of April 4, 2016 Halal meat must include, somewhere on the package, the name of the certifying organization that certified the meat as Halal.
- Currently, when looking for Halal meat, the package should have the name of a Halal certifying organization and not just a Halal symbol. However, this labelling requirement will not come into force until April 4, 2016.
- If the package is not clearly labelled, contact the company.

What about foods other than meat?

- By April 4, 2016, all food that claims to be Halal will be required to include the name of the organization certifying that the food is, in fact, Halal.
- More and more products (e.g., yogurt and cheese) are getting certified and it is indeed the best way to know whether a product is Halal.
- Halal symbols or pictures are not sufficient indicators that the food product is Halal; it must have the name of the certifying organization.
- Most often you will need to read the ingredient lists on foods to check whether they are Halal. For example, cheese could contain rennet.
- When in doubt, call the food company to determine the source of ingredients.

Are Halal and Kosher the same thing?

- No. Kosher refers to foods that are permitted according to the Jewish religion.
- Kosher and Halal food practices are different.
- Kosher symbols should not be used to check whether a product is Halal.

What about vitamins and medicines?

- There could be Haram ingredients, such as gelatin or other animal derived ingredients, in some vitamins and medicines.
- Just like with food, it is important to check the ingredients to ensure that they are all Halal.

Key tips

- Look for Halal certified food ensuring that the name of the certifying organization is shown on the food package, especially for fresh meat such as chicken and beef.
- Plant-based foods are generally Halal.
- Read the ingredients list carefully and regularly, as ingredients can change without notice.
- Contact the food company when in doubt about the source of any ingredient and/or contact a Halal certifying organization for more information.