32 Halal on Campus
J&M® halal certified meals use only wholesome ingredients and have NO MSG, NO SOY, and NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS OR COLORS. Each meal is fully cooked and is conveniently packaged in either 10 oz. (283 g) microwaveable serving dishes or 8 oz. (227 g) travel and camping pouches. Reheat to eat in minutes.

LAMB & LENTIL STEW: Tender lamb joins a medley of tomatoes, lentils, onions, chickpeas, zucchini and red and green sweet peppers. Aromatic herbs and spices invite all to taste and enjoy this truly delicious meal.

LAMB & BARLEY STEW: Tender lamb, combined with barley, eggplant, red and green sweet peppers, zucchini and onions, create a true culinary delight! A scrumptious meal with a variety of textures, it is deliciously seasoned with herbs and spices of the Middle East.

MY KIND OF CHICKEN®: A favorite combination of chunks of light and dark chicken meat with brown rice, peas and carrots in a mild sauce.

CHICKEN MEDITERRANEAN: A hearty chicken meal with the flavors of the Mediterranean region. It has chunks of light and dark chicken meat, tomatoes, potatoes, chickpeas, and black olives in a tangy sauce.

CHICKEN & NOODLES: A winning combination with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, homestyle Kluski noodles, peas and carrots in a lightly seasoned sauce.

CHICKEN & BLACK BEANS: A scrumptious meal with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, black & kidney beans, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet peppers and corn. Simple spicing brings out its full flavor!

BEEF STEW: A satisfying and delicious stew! It has chunks of lean beef, with potatoes, sweet peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, zucchini, chickpeas and carrots in a flavorful sauce.

OLD WORLD STEW: Chunks of lean beef, with brown rice, tomatoes, zucchini and pinto beans. The sauce is seasoned with the aromatic flavors of the Middle East.

PASTA WITH GARDEN VEGETABLES: This delicious and robust meal has rotini pasta with peppers, mushrooms, zucchini and tomatoes. It is perfectly flavored with traditional Italian seasonings.

VEGETARIAN STEW: A meal fit for vegetarian and hearty eater alike! With macaroni, vegetables, potatoes, barley, lentils, peanuts and seasonings, this meal has great taste and a variety of textures.

CHEESETORTELLINI: Cheese-filled tortellini are simply delicious in a well-seasoned tomato sauce, with the added protein and texture of pinto beans.

FLORENTINE LASAGNA: A meal influenced by the tastes of Florence. Savor the combination of small lasagna noodles in a tomato sauce with Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses, spinach and pinto bean pieces which add texture and protein.
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Salaam Readers,

As I write this letter at our IFANCA office in the Windy City, I’m looking out of the window at a glorious winter day with a high of 53°F. Not bad at all for a December afternoon. I do feel guilty about feeling happy at this, given the implication it has for global warming. Based on weather data collected from 1981 to 2010, by the US National Climatic Data Center, the average temperature, in past Decembers at O’Hare International Airport, has been in the range of 35°F and 21°F.

Before I moved to Chicago, I didn’t know 40 below could be actual temperature on earth. Some weeks the American Midwest is colder than Siberia and the two poles. If anyone is thinking of moving to a warmer place—how about Mars? NASA has reported instances when the temperature on Mars was minus 2°F while Chicago was minus 6°F, with a wind chill of minus 20°F. This year, Scotland is said to be bracing itself for a deep freeze. Let’s see how it goes.

Check out the winter recipes we’ve shared with you. The carbs in our truffled, cheesy pasta will give you plenty of warmth. Don’t hesitate to try out Grandma Sally’s mushrooms baked with real butter. Start a snowy morning with the warm, savory porridge recommended by a practitioner of Chinese medicine. Not in the mood for eating vegetables? Just drink them down in the form of smoothies, like the one we have included in this issue.

As always, our articles are very varied. In the current issue, our writer has offered great advice on how to put together a party with novel menus and ideas. There’s information on whether natural flavors are really any different from artificial ones. We’ve discussed why a food fungus is sold at the price of gold. The health section this time focuses on autoimmune disorders, a state in which the body is at war with itself. There is also an article to remind you of the essential nutrients kids need for growth and development. At this time of year, when you may be looking to finalize your child’s college, a healthy dining experience may be high on your priorities. Our main feature in this issue explores how halal food’s reach has broadened to include university campuses. It also discusses ways to advocate for incorporation of halal food into your child’s dining hall menu.

All of us at IFANCA wish you health and prosperity in 2018. May all your aspirations actualize this year. May God’s blessings be with you and yours.

As always, your feedback would be very welcome, whether via email, Facebook, or Twitter.

Happy Reading!

Sincerely,

Haniya Rais Tirmizi content manager
Assalamu Alaikum,

We are commanded by God Almighty to ‘partake of what is lawful (halal) and good (tayyib).’ It is our duty to ensure our consumption is good, clean, and wholesome. The food must be from a halal source, be free from harmful substances, and be produced in a clean environment that meets Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) under the best sanitary conditions. It must also be prepared and served under sanitary conditions avoiding all chances of cross contamination.

While it seems logical and simple to produce halal and wholesome products, it is sometimes challenging because a major portion of the food that enters international trade is produced in facilities that are not dedicated to the production of halal products. Food safety and sanitation laws are enforced quite diligently in the western countries so those products generally meet the definition of wholesome: good, healthy, and promoting the general wellbeing. However, while a product may be wholesome by the European or American definition, it may not be halal. For example, pork sausage, gelatin dessert, or marshmallows may be wholesome but not halal. Similarly, a product can be halal but not wholesome if it is not produced in clean, sanitary conditions. Halal food inspectors are playing an important role in making sure that products are not only halal but they are good and wholesome too.

Whereas manufacturing sites must maintain the wholesome nature of their products, it is also imperative upon food service outlets and retail establishments to practice sanitary conditions. This requires preparing halal and tayyib products using dedicated equipment and utensils. If one dines out in an establishment where halal and non-halal products are prepared and served, one is taking a chance that the halal product may have been contaminated. These establishments must adhere to GMP principles, comply with appropriate food safety requirements, and employ quality systems that ensure the integrity of the halal products and freedom from contamination. Businesses have a legal and civil/fiduciary duty to ensure the halal products they serve are truly halal. And consumers have a right to get products that meet their requirements. It is our obligation to consume pure, wholesome, and halal products.

Sincerely,

Muhammad Munir Chaudry president

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Out of the Box Parties

By Kiran Ansari
At special events, unique trends are becoming more the norm than the exception. Party timings, portion sizes, and menu options are drifting away from the conventional.

When Sarah Siddiqui started planning her wedding, she knew she wanted something different. Like many brides-to-be, she wanted her wedding to be remembered as creative and unique. In addition to her vision for the décor and of course, her dress, she also paid special attention to the menu.

Siddiqui wasn’t any different from other brides in this. It is estimated that 56 percent of all brides have menu as their top priority (Brides Magazine). Siddiqui’s parents wanted the traditional biryani and qorma that is expected at most South Asian weddings. However, being born and raised in Houston, Texas, Siddiqui wanted to add a western flair to her big day. They settled for a unique combination. The large buffet incorporated all the traditional items but was also flanked by novelty food stations on either end. On one side, a live cheese-and-cracker bar and a sushi station served appetizers with a modern twist while on the other side, a donut wall and nitrogen ice cream station left her guests with some sweet memories.

“For weddings and larger parties, most of my clients still have a traditional South Asian menu but with a twist,” said Henna Raza of Professional Party Planners in Chicago. “I have been an event planner for fifteen years and the current trend to incorporate live stations looks like it’s here to stay.” Raza said that live stations are not necessarily just for Western-inspired foods. Bun kabab bars and live pani puri are super popular too. Clients, and brides in particular, just want guests to remember something different.

Mehvish Jaffer Ahmed, from For the Love of Splendor in New Jersey, is also seeing more creative twists requested by her clientele. “With quesadilla or stir fry stations, guests of all ages and ethnicities can enjoy dinner,” she said. “Even the traditional wedding cake is no longer the only dessert.” Ahmed added. “In my six years in the wedding planning industry, I have seen fondue fountains, bubble tea, cotton candy, and the always popular dessert table. Not only are the small color-coordinated treats beautiful to look at, guests can easily take a couple home to enjoy later.”

Beyond Weddings

You don’t need to wait for a wedding to try out a unique food trend. Nowadays smaller dinner parties and baby showers are also planned around a theme. A cute popcorn bar for a baby shower or a live french crepe station for a Parisian Sweet 16 tie in with the occasion and give guests something to talk about even after the party is over.

Even the youngest celebrants are getting themed parties nowadays, for example, a cookie and milk station at a 3-year old birthday isn’t unheard of nor are make-your-own mini pizza parties.

For the health conscious, grazing platters are a popular choice. Colorful veggies flanked by some dips and cheese allow guests to pick and choose what they like to eat as opposed to being served a meat and potato dinner without any options.

In addition to being unique, current food trends also focus more on smaller portions. With people being on diets or wanting to try out multiple items, bite-sized food results in less waste and more variety. Bakeries are offering special mini dessert menus with strawberry shortcake shooters and mousse shots in tiny cups that rate high on the cute factor.

“In my six years in the wedding planning industry, I have seen fondue fountains, bubble tea, cotton candy, and the always popular dessert table. Not only are the small color-coordinated treats beautiful to look at, guests can easily take a couple home to enjoy later.”

Timing Isn’t Everything

Parties are no longer just reserved for dinner time either. Breakfast at Tiffany bridal showers and brunch Hijz parties are ways to include more guests with busy schedules as well as perhaps get better off-peak pricing deals with venues.
Young and hip party goers enjoy the after-party trend too with mini versions of fast food and sweet indulgences into the wee hours of the morning. Tabloids reported that even Prince William and Princess Kate had a milkshake and pizza bash after the Queen and the senior guests left the wedding reception.

Hosts usually always include vegetarian options to accommodate religious requirements. However, of late, vegan and gluten-free dishes are gaining momentum, especially with the younger crowd and their inclination toward the plant-based and anti-cruelty movements.

If you have your heart set on a unique food trend, do check with the venue if they allow outside food and also consider the weather and theme at your wedding. You may love an ice cream truck, but guests may not want to wait at coat check to grab a scoop and then come back inside. A hot chocolate bar may make more sense for a winter wedding.

The Bottom Line

Of course, unique food and fancy live stations come with a price tag. The cost of constantly replenishing high-end food, plus having one or more people stand there to create delicacies on the spot, can add up. If you can afford event planners, it is definitely worth being hassle-free, relaxed, and able to mingle with your guests, instead of worrying about every detail of the event.

But if your wallet doesn’t allow hiring a professional event planner, does that mean you cannot include a unique food trend in your party? Absolutely not. You can come up with your own ideas and then have some friends take turns and serve at the live station. You can also make it more of a DIY (Do It Yourself) option, where you lay everything out before the party and have guests concoct their own masterpieces.

Setting up such stations isn’t too hard. Plan ahead and scour Pinterest boards so you have a vision. Then you can borrow platters and stands from friends and make some mini desserts and appetizers yourself or delegate to enthusiastic friends who ask how they can help. Place your

Novelty Onsite Ideas for your Next Party:

**Savory**
- Spud bar (french fries with various sauces and dry seasonings, mashed potatoes, wedges, baked potatoes, etc.)
- Taco truck
- Chaat station
- Live shawerma
- Pasta bar
- Waffle or pancake bar
- Fresh guacamole, salsa, tabbouleh, or fattoush

**Sweet**
- Live knafeh
- Live jalebi
- DIY falooda
- Hot chocolate bar
- Shaved ice
- Cold stone or Thai rolled ice cream
- Dipping Dots
- Taffy apple stations
- Cake jar bar
- Cupcake trucks
delicacies in pretty dishes at differing heights with a unifying theme and you have yourself a pretty dessert table or other station. And so what if it doesn’t look like the blog you were inspired by? No one knows what it was “supposed” to look like.

**Eat, Drink, and Be Halal**

Within the Muslim community, halal also plays a major role in party menu planning. “Most families will not even consider a venue that will not allow outside catering if they will not serve zabiha meat,” Ahmed said. “As a guest of a Muslim wedding, it is almost a given that the meat will be zabiha. Even if some guests do not eat zabiha-only meat outside of a wedding, there are still many who will not eat the meat otherwise.”

Raza agrees. “Halal is still very important and being offered in a lot more mainstream venues now. Even if the hosts don’t eat only zabiha, most people won’t serve guests non-zabiha.”

**Do it for the ‘Gram**

Social media is a big factor in the popularity of these unique food trends. Back in the day, only the people invited to a party got to enjoy the food. However, now with Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, you can easily ooh and aah (or roll your eyes) at a party menu while snuggled in bed in your pajamas. This has certainly put more pressure on the hosts to impress, but it has also led to a surge in creativity and variety.

So regardless of your occasion or budget, there are sure to be some unique food trends that you can incorporate into your next party that will wow your guests and leave you with fond memories of being a host that isn’t afraid to flaunt his or her style.

**KIRAN ANSARI** is a professional juggler, as in she wears several different hats on a daily basis. Find out more at www.kiran-ansari.com.
Drinking Your Vegetables

By Nadia Malik
Although not a new trend by any means, green juices have become ubiquitous. Juice bars have popped up hailing cold-pressed concoctions (care for some dandelion greens and celery?), and health sites boast of hundreds of recipes that help the calorie-conscious drink down their vegetables. Juice cleanses are making the rounds of celebrity recommendations, and single-serve blenders have also become available so that busy commuters can whir-up smoothies in the morning and take them on the go.

Mariam Malik, a radiology resident at Loyola Hospital, began the process of replacing meals—mostly breakfast but also an after-dinner snack—with juiced vegetables more than three months ago, when she was seeking solutions for medical issues. “It was a total lifestyle change,” she says. “I’ve lost weight, I feel way more energetic; my mood has been better, too.”

When Malik took on the project, she researched recipes and bought a plethora of produce to do some testing. She also invested in a juicer. She pulled out a book given to her as a present and experimented for a bit to see what worked and what didn’t. She found out that broccoli, for example, just wasn’t a great ingredient in large quantities and made the whole thing unpalatable. Now Malik is settled on a routine of alternating red and green juices, both with a base of spinach and kale. The green color comes from lemon, ginger, parsley, and green apples. The red consists of beets, red apples, oranges, and turmeric. She uses a range of vegetables; fruits such as apples or pineapples are also added in smaller quantities to make the drinks more appealing. However, she consciously makes sure she limits the fruits so that the daily libation is not just a vehicle for sugar.

Malik doesn’t find the preparation too hard either. Since the juicer removes the skin of the produce she puts in it, she has to just have the right proportions and some time to make a two-day stock that can set in the refrigerator. She avoids leaving it longer than 72 hours to ensure that it’s fresh. Before this new routine, Malik had a tough time incorporating healthy foods into her daily lifestyle. Besides just drinking vegetables, she’s made other adjustments too, such as using cauliflower in place of mashed potatoes. However, the easiest way to take in leafy greens, for her, has been to pulverize them.

She also prefers smoothies over juices; the major difference is that the former is made in the blender and the latter goes through a juicer. In smoothies, she also throws in other healthy and protein-packed ingredients, such as flax seeds, chia seeds, and yogurt. She will sometimes put in aloe or cucumber too. That’s also the reason many prefer ingredients with high water content. These provide a fulfilling and plentiful base to add other ingredients to, which may be harder to make room for, when on a diet.

Nutritionists do, however, warn against relying too much on liquefied leafy greens versus eating them in raw or cooked form. Shahana Khan, a registered and licensed dietitian, says she prefers smoothies over juices, when a client insists on having one or the other because smoothies tend to keep more fiber as the whole fruit or veggie is put into the blender. Fiber helps with digestion, regularity, and lowering cholesterol and it also breaks down sugar in fibrous fruit. “If you don’t get enough time to eat your fruits and vegetables and you think this is a faster way to get it in you, once in a while, go ahead,” she recommends. “But, try not to make it every day.” It’s also harder, Khan says, for the brain to recognize when the body is full, if food is consumed in liquid form. “Lots of things go on when you chew your food,” she continues. “If you’re drinking food, your brain can’t signal, ‘Okay, I’ve consumed enough calories.’ You might be consuming more calories in the day if you’re drinking your calories.”

Malik feels confident that she may be losing out on fiber but is still taking in the necessary vitamins, especially as she’s seen such a change in her demeanor.” I just have a more positive attitude and have more tolerance for little things,” she explains. Plus, she’s been able to keep up the routine, which is a positive sign for her.

Anyone who wants to go the juicing or smoothie route has to be wary of how many fruits are going into each serving. Items like tomato blends are more savory, so they can be a good alternative. Fruits and vegetables should be changed to include a variety, and Khan also prescribes taking health history into consideration. For example, someone with a history of diabetes or having a baby should consult a doctor first, before getting on any type of regimen.
halal certified products, such as Saffron Road’s chicken broth, to make life easy.

Another recommendation for vegetable intake is in soup form instead. While that takes more work, soups can be made in batches and taken out on a daily basis—an especially good option in the cold months. “The nutrients go into the water, and you can drink the nutrients up. There’s no sugar, so you don’t have to worry about calories that much,” Khan explains regarding soups. “I recommend soups a lot for patients who want to lose weight and don’t like eating vegetables.”

Similar to smoothies, if people choose to go that route, Khan recommends making the soup at home. “That’s the best way, you know what’s in it,” she contends. “You can control the amount of ingredients you put in there.” Easier said than done. There are, none the less, IFANCA

Khan also doesn’t recommend juicing for the sake of detoxing the body, as is the hype that many, especially celebrities, push. “God made us an automatic detoxification system,” she says. However, she condones going this route if it replaces something unhealthy, such as processed or fried foods. The removal of those items will automatically give the liver and kidney, which remove toxins in the body, a rest. Khan also agrees that a change in eating habits, such as smoothies or juices, can be a big kick-start for the weight-loss process, although they shouldn’t be a crutch to rely on.

So, is pulverizing veggies into smoothies and soups better than wholesome vegetables in raw or cooked form? Guess not, but then something is better than nothing! And they are certainly a notch above juices!

NADIA MALIK holds a degree in journalism and is a former reporter for a Chicago-area newspaper. She has written for websites and publications and has also worked for several non-profit organizations. She is currently in a graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania, studying social work and nonprofit leadership.
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THE BODY AT WAR WITH ITSELF

By Linda Gardner Phillips
It’s easy to envy those cheerful people who rarely get sick and recover rapidly from occasional illnesses. Conventional wisdom says that, “they were born that way”—but recent Cell research studies (http://www.cell.com) show that genetics play a surprisingly minor role in our health. Starting in the womb, each one of us builds a unique immune system, and the system’s ability to keep us healthy depends on many variables, including choices we can control (such as diet and lifestyle) and factors we cannot (such as aging or a past illness).

Once we realize that we can influence our own immunity, we are tempted to search for a secret key to health. How wonderful it would be to discover a one-size-fits-all solution! But of course, it’s really not so simple.

What Is the Immune System?

The immune system is difficult to understand. Our defense team of cells, proteins, tissues, and internal organs works collaboratively to protect our bodies against germs and illness. Researchers continue to unravel immunity’s intricate playbook to decipher how the different team members coordinate. Meanwhile, autoimmune disease continues to be the #1 most popular health information request, according to the National Women’s Health Information Center.

When Systems Go Awry

The story of immunity includes many twists and turns. When your immune system jumps into action to fight a health challenge, you might feel run-down or uncomfortable. Some of those feelings are the result of your body doing its job. For example, a cold can leave your nose feeling “stuffed-up” and itchy. That’s because white blood cells and connective tissues fight the cold virus by releasing histamine. While this neurotransmitter helps bring blood and liquids to the infected areas, it also causes the unpleasant side effects of inflammation and itchiness.

Auto-immune disorders confuse the tale of immunity: nonsensically, the body begins attacking itself... This strange process starts at a micro-level, but can cause a ripple effect throughout the body.
Auto-immune disorders confuse the tale of immunity: nonsensically, the body begins attacking itself. Normally, antibodies are protective blood proteins with the important job of identifying germs and other pathogens and marking them for destruction. During an auto-immune disorder, the antibodies go awry and attack the body’s own tissues. This strange process starts at a micro-level, but can cause a ripple effect throughout the body.

Nearly 50 million Americans suffer from an auto-immune related disorder, according to the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association. Some common auto-immune disorders include diabetes, Hashimoto’s disease, and lupus. Diabetes targets the pancreas, Hashimoto’s disease damages the thyroid gland, and lupus harms multiple parts of the body, including joints, lungs, blood cells, and nerves.

In diabetes, the body attacks the pancreatic cells which produce insulin, an energy-gatekeeper hormone which regulates blood sugar levels. Eventually, the damaged pancreas can’t produce enough insulin to keep up. Blood sugar levels rise, causing noticeable symptoms such as blurred vision, frequent urination, and other disturbing effects such as unplanned weight loss, nausea, or vomiting.

Hashimoto’s disease gradually destroys the thyroid gland and slows the production of hormones which control metabolism and heart rate. A person suffering from Hashimoto’s may get fatigued, feel muscle cramps, or be unable to lose unwanted weight.

Lupus is a chronic inflammatory disorder with uncomfortable symptoms, including painful joints, fever, and facial rash. Even with good medical treatment, immune system disorders can make it difficult for a person to get through daily life.

Dr. Mark Hyman, MD, a practicing family physician, Director at Cleveland Clinic, and New York Times bestselling author, believes that the cure to autoimmune disorders lies in a holistic approach—a paradigm shift to functional medicine, which many doctors overlook. He maintains, “These (autoimmune disorders) are often addressed by powerful immune suppressing medication and not by addressing the cause. The treatment is not more aspirin or a strong immune suppressant, but removing the tack. Treat the fire, not the smoke. When my patient described how he cured his autoimmune disease by finding and eliminating the causes of inflammation in his diet and environment, it was dismissed as a ‘spontaneous remission.’ In the face of a paradigm-shattering medical case, these doctors were hardly curious and quickly dismissive, describing what was shared as anecdotal.”

Dr. Hyman’s checklist for calming the immune response naturally:

- Get your doctor to treat hidden infections—eliminate yeast, viruses, bacteria, Lyme, etc.
- Check for hidden food allergens.
- Get tested for celiac disease (gluten intolerance).
- Get checked for heavy metal toxicity such as that caused by mercury.
- Fix your gut and treat irritable bowel syndrome.
- Use nutrients such as fish oil, vitamins C and D, and probiotics.
- Exercise regularly and manage stress.

The storyline gets more complex when we realize that building a healthier immune system means different things for different people. Each person is a distinct individual with unique habits and histories, which affect the body’s ability to protect itself. On the bright side, some foods and simple self-care practices may offer some relief while strengthening overall immunity.

Self-Care for Stronger Immunity

Researchers, health and fitness advisors, and your favorite auntie may all have their own points of view about how to build health. In general, certain self-care choices, as stated by Dr. Hymen, make a difference. For example, eating whole foods, reducing stress, resting,
exercising adequately, and spending time in nature all may improve your body’s ability to stay healthy.

Start by eating a balanced diet and cooking with fresh ingredients. Increase your use of “superfoods”—delicious ingredients and dishes that pack an extra nutritional punch. Homemade chicken soup remains a world-famous home-remedy for the common cold. Scientists and nutritionists continue to explore the benefits of other popular and immune-boosting foods, including garlic (fights infection), yogurt (boosts immunity in the elderly), black tea (supports digestion), and ginger (reduces inflammation).

For generations, the family of acupuncturist Jin Ohneiser (formerly Jin H. Ngan) has practiced traditional Chinese medicine, a time-honored approach to healing which treats the body as an integrated whole. Many of her clients in Chicago, Illinois, struggle with infertility and other systemic health issues, such as irritable bowel syndrome. Ohneiser firmly believes in the power of warm and healthy home-cooked meals as a key part of the healing process. “Breakfast should be warm and easy to digest. I like hot stew/soup, porridge, and hot tea in the morning,” says Jin.

Daphne Paras, a health and wellness educator, was diagnosed with Lupus in 2000. She’s convinced that healthy eating holds the key to her long-term well-being. “The conventional treatment of cortisone shots could have provided short-term relief, but changing my cooking, eating, and lifestyle habits noticeably reduced my inflammation and increased my vitality, which allowed me to return to normal activities over the long term.” Paras eliminated processed foods from her family’s diet, and cooks meals with grass-fed meats and organic greens. She often starts her day with a homemade fruit and vegetable smoothie.

Dance instructor and wellness student Ellie Huber worked hard to research and overcome her poorly diagnosed auto-immune issues. After identifying stress as a major factor, she approached her own health with an open mind. She started feeling better after slowing her busy lifestyle and adding non-vegetarian foods to her diet. “Constant stress triggers my fight-or-flight mode,” says Huber. “I learned to ease my tension by letting go of things I can’t control. Listening to my body, and backing off from overly-intense workouts also helped me heal. Adding high-quality Omega-3 fats to my meals with grass-fed butters and meats boosts my mood, and keeps my energy levels even.”

Recent research studies echo Paras’ and Huber’s insights and also confirm the positive impact of meditation and prayer. Scientists attribute many benefits to the “relaxation response,” a conscious yet calm state of mind and body. Studies published by PLOS ONE, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, suggest that “mind-body intervention” may help reverse the destructive gene-level changes caused by stress and inflammation.

Spending time in nature and in prayer can also benefit immunity. Research in Japan by Qing Li has shown that “forest bathing can increase the number of cancer-fighting cells in the body for up to a month. Remember that enjoying nature doesn’t need to be a major outing. It can be as uncomplicated as caring for a houseplant or breathing the fresh air outside your doorstep.

Don’t forget to get enough sleep for a more responsive immune system. At night the body releases cytokines, special infection-fighting proteins. Sleep deprivation results in lower cytokine levels which can inhibit your body’s ability to stay healthy, according to psychoneuroimmunology studies at UCLA.

Taking steps to build a stronger immune system may increase your feelings of well-being. Daily stresses take a toll on immunity, so take it easy. Why not also be gentle on yourself by introducing some superfoods and simple self-care practices into your routine? Listen to your body’s signals, if something doesn’t seem right, don’t procrastinate consulting your physician.

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Nutrients for Kids

By Asma Jarad
Most kids are picky eaters, which may well explain the boom in the multivitamin industry. Statista reports that from 2000 to 2017, the retail sales of vitamins and nutritional supplements in the United States topped $36 billion. With the popularity of supplements increasing every year, one would assume that popping a pill is the cure-all for our children getting all the vitamins and nutrition they need to grow healthy, smart, and strong. There is actually little scientific evidence to prove that supplements are a replacement for a balanced diet. The challenge is not only sourcing the right amount of vitamins and minerals, but also obtaining a wide and balanced variety from the diet. How many parents can honestly declare that their kids’ diets are always balanced and healthy?

Grocery shopping for adults is way easier than it is for kids. Parents and caregivers aren’t always able to offer attractive food choices to them. Making the situation worse are the fast food and snack industries that target the young and their parents with enticing advertisements. They promise tasty meals on the go—which as we know are not always the most wholesome choices. For some people, finding the time and energy to select the best food options is just not possible. For others, financial limitations dictate the items in their shopping carts. An easy way out then is to offer children a once-a-day multivitamin to fill the nutritional gap for the essential daily nutrients, namely iron, calcium, vitamin D, B vitamins, and vitamin E. IFANCA certifies as halal, a wide range of children’s dietary supplement gummies by Salaam Nutritionals and Noor Vitamins®—which are a way more palatable option, for the little ones, than syrups and pills!

...the primary and best choice for obtaining vitamins and nutrients is to get them directly from a healthy diet based on fruits and vegetables...

Iron is an essential nutrient for growth and development. It helps move oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Iron also helps muscles store and use oxygen. A child who does not consume enough iron may develop iron-deficiency or anemia—a condition that lacks adequate healthy red blood cells and negatively affects muscle and brain function. Foods such as red meats, turkey, lentils, leafy vegetables, tofu, and dark chocolate should be consumed daily in order to obtain 7-10 milligrams of iron a day. Requirements are even higher for teenage boys and for girls who are post-puberty. When it is not possible to consume enough iron from food, a chewable supplement, Forever Kids® is a good option. Its manufacturing company is not only IFANCA halal certified, but also formulates its vitamins “without artificial colors or preservatives.” Furthermore, the supplement’s “phytonutrient base is taken from such nutritious foods as carrots, beets, broccoli, spinach, blueberries, apples, tomatoes, and strawberries,” as stated on their website.

Calcium is another essential building block for growing children. A healthy daily dose of calcium helps ensure that children’s bones and teeth have solid growth for now and reserves for the future when bone-loss becomes an issue in advanced age. Julian Huang, MD, a board-certified pediatrician, notes, “The need for increased calcium acquisition and storage begins very early in life—especially in the pre-adolescent years.” When dairy products, green leafy vegetables, or salmon are not on the menu, a calcium supplement of at least 700 milligrams for toddlers, 1,000 milligrams for school-aged children, and 1,300 milligrams for teens, is recommended.

Vitamin D, commonly referred to as the ‘sunshine vitamin’ because the human body naturally produces it when directly exposed to sunlight, works in tandem with calcium to regulate its absorption and to facilitate a normal immune system function. Kids who spend at least 15 minutes a day outside are sure to catch up on vitamin D. With the increase in time spent indoors, mostly with personal devices, there is less exposure to the Sun. Children and teens need at least 600 International Units (IU) of vitamin D per day. Natural food sources of vitamin D include salmon, sardines, egg yolks, shrimp, orange juice, and of course, dairy. Since nearly half of the American population lacks appropriate levels of vitamin D, many doctors highly recommend a vitamin D supplement. According to a recent study published in the Harvard School of Public Health, “Being ‘D-ficient’ may increase the risk of a host of chronic diseases, such as osteoporosis, heart disease, some cancers, and multiple sclerosis, as well as infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and even the seasonal flu.”

B vitamins, also known as B complex, are vital for energy, heart health, metabolism, and the nervous system. The human body does not create B complex; it is absorbed through foods such as whole grain cereal, poultry, meat, dairy, eggs, bananas, and legumes. Paul Elsass, a sports medicine and exercise writer, points out that, “B vitamin deficiency can lead to abnormal growth and development in children, so adequate intake is crucial.” Doses for this group of vitamins are measured in micrograms. For toddlers and young children, about one microgram is needed daily. For older children and teens, about two micrograms.

Finally, vitamin E, although considered a necessary antioxidant in terms of protecting body tissue from free
radicals, is not considered necessary to be given as a supplement for two main reasons. Firstly, it is already in many kid-friendly foods such as almonds, peanut butter, cereals, juices, and bread. Therefore, vitamin E deficiency in kids is rare. Secondly, Dr. Vincent Ianneli, a board-certified physician, cautions that, “Too much vitamin E can lead children to have bleeding problems.”

As the term implies, supplements are meant to supplement and are by no means a replacement for a balanced diet.

In a 2013 seminar conducted by Harvard Medical School, titled “Food and Vitamins and Supplements! Oh My!”, a panel of experts discussed whether taking a multivitamin is healthy or self-delusional. The panel concurs that the primary and best choice for obtaining vitamins and nutrients is to get them directly from a healthy diet based on fruits and vegetables because they naturally contain a variety of healthful benefits. According to a recent Harvard-led Physicians Health Study (PHSII), taking a multivitamin slightly lowers the risk of cancer. “But if you take a multivitamin already or plan to, don’t let it distract you from eating a varied and nutritious diet,” cautions the study. At the same time, one cannot discount the value of even a slight benefit when it comes to reducing the risk of cancer. Dr. Gaziano, a contributor to the study says, “If you consider even a modest reduction in the risk for a disease as common as cancer in the population at large, it’s not trivial numbers that you’re talking about.”

It is crucial to remember that every child is unique and will undoubtedly have their own health needs, so be sure to consult with a qualified health care provider before beginning or changing any supplemental regimen. While vitamin supplements, when used properly, are a great bio-technological advancement, overusing them can lead to health issues such as nausea, abdominal pain, or neurological harm. As the term implies, supplements are meant to supplement and are by no means a replacement for a balanced diet. Another important thing to note here is that many foods in the United States today are already fortified with vitamins and nutrients, so if your child is eating a balanced diet, supplements may be given only on a needs basis.

In the end, remember that Islam teaches us that the time of youth is blessed and must be used wisely. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said, in a Hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas, “There are two blessings which many people lose: health and free time for doing good.”— Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 6, Hadith 421. Most children are fortunate to be born with these two blessings, and it is for us to ensure that they stay healthy and use their time wisely.

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A Mold Sold at the Cost of Gold

By Haniya Rais Tirmizi

No, not the chocolate ones. We’re talking about the other ones—perhaps the priciest food on earth, comparable only to gold leaf sheets and caviar. At a recent Sotheby’s auction in New York, a 4.16 pound white truffle is reported to have sold at a “bargain” price of $61,250, to a phone bidder in China (mentalfloss.com). Black truffles, the more common variety, currently cost about $95 per ounce while white truffles top the list at $168 per ounce. No wonder they are called ‘black diamonds’ in France. It’s no surprise that the cost involved has brought organized crime into its trade, creating black markets and leading to theft of both truffles as well as its diggers, the highly valued truffle-sniffing dogs. Prices drop a little bit only when the harvest is good in years of abundant rain.
Believe it or not, they are really just knobby, ugly lumps of fungus that grow near roots of trees and come in two colors: black and white. They are a wild product, the production of which cannot be controlled. Their harvesting is mainly in Italy, Spain, France, Croatia, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, China, and the Middle East. The combination of European red soil and rainy summers produces the rich, earthy flavor of European truffles, not to be found in any of the others. The Asian variety, called the Himalayan, also doesn’t match up to the European. Recreating conducive habitats has yielded little success in Australia and in the United States.

Allison Brustin, a food connoisseur and hostess of Chicago Consular Corps Ladies Club social events, talking about her experience at the Truffle Festival in Alba, Italy says, “It is amazing to meet the people who actually hunt the truffles, and to experience the continuing traditions that have endured for so long. It can’t be duplicated by modern technology. Sampling the old traditional dishes afterwards was a delicious experience. Brie, with truffle-infused honey served on baguette, and minced mushrooms, in truffle oil served on crackers, were the two most memorable treats.”

According to gourmetfoodstore.com, the summer black truffle is “not as spectacularly fragrant and aromatic as the white truffle, but it does have a very nice perfume, much more subtle, but still quite lovely. They are better utilized by being cooked, to bring out most of that subtly earthy, chocolaty flavor as possible.”

Black or white, they are indeed delicious. Just an ounce of shavings on risotto or pasta can make all the difference in taste. They are delicacies in French, Croatian, Georgian, Bulgarian, Greek, Italian, Middle Eastern, and Spanish cuisine, as well as in international haute cuisine, the finest of French dining. You can find them at tables of elegant restaurants in You.

The most widely collected ones are the Middle Eastern Terfez truffles, also known as “desert truffles”. They are harvested in the semi-arid regions of North Africa and the Middle East, from Morocco to Iraq, where they have been unearthed from the desert, after heavy rainfalls, from time immemorial. They are traditionally cooked with dishes such as couscous. This variety, some say, is overpoweringly perfumed. It is white, and the harvesting season goes from late December to early April.

Ancient civilizations, such as the Greek and the Roman, credited truffles with both therapeutic and aphrodisiac power. The recipes for truffles by the Roman chef, Apicius, are as old as the early fifth century. The Arabs used to call them Banat Ar-Ra’d, or the “Daughters of Thunder” (islamweb.net) and valued them as food and medicine in Prophet Muhammad’s (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]) time. Sa’id bin Zaid reported the Prophet (PBUH) as saying: “Truffles are a kind of ‘Manna’ which God sent down upon Moses and their juice is medicine for the eyes.”—Sahih Muslim, Book 36, Hadith 220.

The most widely collected ones are the Middle Eastern Terfez truffles... unearthed from the desert, after heavy rainfalls, from time immemorial.

Given the fact that they have been mentioned together with the finest of dates (the Ajwah), it appears that truffles were comparable in their value to them. Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Al-‘Ajwah is from paradise and it contains a cure for poison. Truffles are a form of manna, and its liquid is a cure for the eye.”—Jami at-Tirmidhi, Vol 4, Book 2, Hadith 2066. Qatadah said, “It was narrated to me that Abu Hurairah said: ‘I took three truffles, or five, or seven, and pressed them. Then I put their liquid in a bottle, and I liquid the eyes of a slave girl of mine with it and she was cured.’”—Jami at-Tirmidhi, Vol. 4, Book 2, Hadith 2069.

So what exactly is this ‘water of the truffles?’ It has been explained by Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim (13th century theologian) as having three possible interpretations. It was not to be used alone but mixed with other eye medicine, as historical evidence suggests, based on procedures followed by Abu Ubayd, a Persian physician from the 11th century. It may also have been used after it was exposed to fire for purification before application. A third explanation is that the water could very well be rainwater on the truffles, though this appears to be the weakest interpretation. According to Imam An-Nawawi (another 13th century theologian), the truffle should be squeezed and its water dropped into the eyes. (www.islamweb.net). He also claimed that he and other men saw completely blind persons recover their eyesight by applying its water.

Nature never fails to fascinate us with what it brings forth. I’d certainly like to have more opportunities to taste this intriguing treasure of the earth...and I’d better start saving for it!

HANIYA TIRMIZI is the Content Manager of Halal Consumer® Magazine. She is an educationalist who specializes in second-language instruction. A trailing spouse of a diplomat, she’s a foodie who also writes poetry, and is a weekend yogi.
To-Die-For Carrot Cake
By: Zohah Beg

Servings: 8–10

INGREDIENTS

- 3 eggs
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cups white sugar, plus additional ½ cup for cake soak
- ¼ cup dark brown sugar
- ¼ cup coconut cream
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, plus additional 1 teaspoon for cake soak
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, plus additional teaspoon for cake soak
- ½ teaspoon salt, plus an additional ¼ teaspoon for cake soak
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 cups shredded carrots
- 1 cup shredded coconut
- 1 (8 ounce) can crushed pineapple with juice
- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- 2 tubs Organic Valley cream cheese frosting (16 ounces)

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Grease and flour three round 8-inch pans.
2. In your mixer bowl, combine eggs, buttermilk, oil, sugars, coconut cream, and vanilla. Mix well.
3. Mix flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Next add your carrots, coconut, crushed pineapple with juice and chopped walnuts. Mix until just blended.
4. Divide the batter into the two pans and bake at 350°F for 35 minutes. If finger lightly pressed in the center bounces back, it is done.
5. Make the cake soak while the cake is baking: mix the ⅓ cup sugar, ⅓ cup water, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon, ¼ teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon vanilla in a small, microwave-safe bowl and stir until combined. Microwave for 2-3 minutes while watching closely so that it does not boil over. It should be a deep brown color and a thin, syrupy texture. Set aside.
6. Once you remove the cakes from the oven, allow to cool slightly before inverting onto the cake plate. Gently ladle the sugar syrup over each of the baked layers and allow the cake to absorb the soak while it cools.
7. Spread a generous layer of Organic Valley cream cheese frosting on one layer. Put the other layer on top, and repeat. Once you have finished stacking the cake, layer with the remaining cream cheese frosting (on top and the sides). Slice and enjoy!
Truffled Pasta
By: Haniya Tirmizi

Servings: 8

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon black truffles, finely chopped
½ a pound of any pasta of your choice by Helios Pasta Industry
2 tablespoons olive oil
3 tablespoons lightly-salted Organic Valley butter
3/4 cup bread crumbs
1 small onion, finely chopped
1/4 cup white flour
3 cups Organic Valley whole milk
1 pound cheddar cheese by Cabot, grated
1/2 pound Gruyere cheese, grated
salt to taste
black pepper to taste, coarsely crushed
1/2 teaspoon paprika
4 tablespoons fresh thyme, finely chopped
1 bay leaf

DIRECTIONS

1. Cook the pasta till al dente. Add olive oil to it while cooking, so it doesn’t stick. Drain fully and set aside.
2. Sauté onion in butter. Add flour, and then add milk gradually for smooth consistency. Cook to make white sauce. Use an immersion blender if the sauce turns out lumpy.
3. Add salt, pepper, paprika, bay leaf and thyme to the sauce as it cooks. Sauce should not be runny.
4. Mix the pasta, the sauce, and the minced black truffles.
5. Put in a dish, top with crumbs, and bake at 375°F for approximately 45 minutes or till it bubbles.
6. If truffles upset your grocery budget, you can substitute them with 1/2 a cup of minced, sautéed mushrooms!
Grandma Sally’s Mushrooms
By: Sally Ryan King

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS

1 pound whole mushrooms
2 cubes halal beef bullion
½ cup hot water
1 stick Organic Valley® lightly-salted butter
2 tablespoons white flour
½ cup Organic Valley® heavy cream
a dash of pepper
½ ½ cup bread crumbs
1 1 cup Parmesan cheese

DIRECTIONS

1. In a pan, sauté mushrooms in ½ stick butter, remove and set aside.
2. In a separate bowl, dissolve beef cubes in hot water.
3. In the same pan, melt the other ½ stick butter and blend with flour.
4. Add butter, cream, pepper, beef broth and bring the sauce to a simmer. Add the mushrooms now.
5. Place the mushroom-sauce mixture in a casserole dish.
6. Top with cheese and bread crumbs.
7. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes.
8. Voila! It’s this easy! ☺️
Spinach and Fruit Smoothie
By: Daphne Paras

Servings: 1

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons halal protein powder
- 8 strawberries
- 1 banana
- 1 cup fresh spinach
- 1 tablespoon hemp or chia seed
- 1 tablespoon coconut butter (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Place all ingredients in blender.
2. Blend on high speed until smooth.
3. Enjoy.
Savory Morning Porridge
By: Jin Ohneiser

Servings: 2–4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup whole grains (brown rice/red rice/purple rice/sorghum/quinua or a combination of all)
- 10 cups water (or halal chicken or veggie broth; preferably homemade)
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- ½ cup scallions, chopped
- ¼ cup ginger, minced
- ½ cup goji berries (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. At night, place grains and water (or broth) into a crock pot.
2. Cook overnight on the low setting.
3. In the morning, serve porridge into bowls.
4. Sprinkle each bowl of porridge with toasted sesame oil, scallions, ginger, salt and pepper, and goji berries (optional), and serve.
Flavors ensure your processed food is palatable. Have you also noticed that when a taste doesn’t linger, like it does in your favorite bubble-gum, you’re reaching for more? Flavorists tweak the combination of these chemicals so you want more. Flavors are the reason you dig into that bowl of BBQ flavored chips repeatedly, loop into the drive-through for mouth-watering french fries or take a second-helping of that crunchy pecan ice-cream. If you believe those french fries are just deep fried potatoes and salt—think again! Some french fries recipes include hydrolyzed wheat and hydrolyzed milk. The resulting ingredient, Monosodium Glutamate (MSG), a flavor enhancer, is what makes fries so irresistible. MSG can be hidden under Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein in some products. According to a widely reported study, lab rats given MSG ate 40% more. This is because MSG tampers with the brain’s appetite regulation center, the hypothalamus, causing leptin resistance. Leptin is the hormone that controls satiety, a feeling of fullness. There
are 151 other studies also linking MSG with obesity in humans and rats alike!

The chocolate chip flavor in those cookies you love? Yes, chemical flavors have been manipulated to create a bolder, instantly-gratifying, lip-smacking taste, to ensure you’ll be hooked. Again, that’s not just sugar in there. When salty and sweet flavors combine, the flavors meld, and the kick is twice as good as a single flavor by itself. Our brain experiences sensory specific satiety; it bores of the same taste over and over. The salt sugar ‘flavor layering’ is an antidote to sensory-specific satiety. Salt, a flavor enhancer, also enhances the sugar flavor. Think you can resist your fifth cookie? Unlikely! That cookie has been engineered to make that almost impossible.

Flavors also ensure that packaged food tastes fresh. According to EWG’s Food Scores, “to make a product like orange juice taste fresh after pasteurization, these chemicals have to be restored. They dupe your taste buds and smell receptors into believing you are drinking fresh orange juice when it really may be rather old.” But, no, flavors are not used to mask expired food. That should put to rest all the rumors that chocolate milk is spoiled white milk recycled with added flavors and color.

Still, there’s a movement afoot, demanding that the catch all term “natural and artificial flavors” be replaced with full disclosure of all chemicals. Full disclosure can help identify food allergies. Advocates also believe people have the right to know exactly what they’re ingesting, especially if they are inhibiting satiety receptors and the like.

When Sick, Why Can’t You Taste Your Food?

When we think flavors, we think of taste. However, flavors combine taste and smell. “Smell makes up 80 to 90 percent of the sense of taste. In processed food, this mixture of chemicals is called ‘flavor.’ The same mixture of chemicals would be called ‘fragrance’ if it were found in cleaning products, perfumes, or cosmetics. The difference between the two is small, and the companies that produce these secret mixtures are often exactly the same,” according to EWG’s Food Scores.

Natural or Artificial?

Most consumers instinctively consider natural flavors as good and artificial flavors not so. But as food scientist, Haider Khattak, Director, Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of Canada (IFANCC) will tell you there is no basis to it. Surprise, surprise! Both kinds of ingredients are typically made in a lab by a professional flavorist, mixing and matching chemicals together to achieve a certain flavor, he explains. There is little difference between them when it comes to safety or the “chemical structures of the individual molecules”. The distinction between natural and artificial flavors only refers to the source of their ingredients. Natural flavors are derived from plant or animal material.

“My father had me reading his scientific papers as early as elementary school and my very logical mom is very practical and sees no reason for not using artificial flavors instead of those expensive natural (ones) so I’ve actually heard all of this at home over the years,” says writer Linda Gardner, a daughter of scientists, living at the Deerpath Farm Conservation Community in Lake County, IL.

Chemical flavors have been manipulated to create a bolder, instantly-gratifying, lip-smacking taste, to ensure you’ll be hooked.

“Natural flavors are derived from natural sources, while artificial flavors are simpler versions created by people using chemical ingredients. Natural does not necessarily mean “healthier”, it just means “more expensive”. Chemically, the two versions may be very close or indistinguishable,” says Linda, a huge advocate of natural prefers whole foods (not to be confused with the store) for cooking and chooses natural vanilla for her cookies!

Food manufacturers would concur and even argue that artificial flavors are better because they contain fewer chemicals than natural ones and are simpler in composition. And, as Linda points out, they also cost less. Scientificamerican.com gives an example. “Natural coconut flavorings, for example, depend on a chemical called massoya lactone. Massoya lactone comes from the bark of the Massoya tree, which grows in Malaysia. (Collecting this natural chemical also kills the tree because harvesters must remove the bark to obtain the lactone.) The process is costly. This pure natural chemical is identical to the version made in an organic chemist’s laboratory, yet it is much more expensive than the synthetic alternative.”

So What’s in a Halal Flavor?

More than 100 ingredients can go into creating a single flavor, explains Khattak. And all it takes is one of those ingredients to be considered non-halal to disqualify it from halal certification. What do halal food auditors look
for when evaluating flavors? First, they assess whether the ingredients in a flavor are plant or animal derived. According to Khattak, flavor manufacturers do keep records of animal by-products used in the flavors. If there is a poultry or cattle derived ingredient in a particular flavor, manufacturers are required to show evidence of Islamic slaughter certification for qualifying as halal.

Smoke and grill flavors are extremely popular among consumers. In the flavor industry, animal fats or emulsifiers from animal sources are often used as a base for smoke or grill flavors. They act as preservatives for the meat and modify their taste. Smoke flavoring is among the most commonly used, says Khattak, and this smoke renders a food non-halal, if animal ingredients are used.

Similarly, they assess whether a flavor contains alcohol. To be considered halal, a flavor should be alcohol free or its alcohol content should be reduced to less than 0.5%. The alcohol used in the manufacture of the flavor should be derived from grain or synthetic sources and not from alcoholic drinks (Khamr). If a flavor is used in a product, the final product’s alcohol content must be less than 0.1%. “When we say alcohol, it means ethanol (ethyl alcohol). It is permissible to use alcohol for extracting the flavors or dissolving them so long as the alcohol is required for processing, not for the alcohol flavor itself, and the alcohol is not from alcoholic beverages. However, the amount of alcohol should be reduced to less than 0.5% in the flavor and to less than 0.1% in the final product where the flavor is used,” says Khattak. All types of vinegar, are permitted in Islam although it is a product of fermented alcohol. This fermentation process is a change in nature and is known as Istihala.

“Natural and artificial flavors in bakery products are the most important ingredients for halal consumers,” says Khattak. “They must be plant-based. Petroleum-based propylene glycol is considered a halal solvent for flavoring.”

There is in fact, a specialized field that studies the perception of flavor. It combines food science, neuroscience, and psychology and is called Neurogastronomy—a worthy discipline to study given the tricks taste buds play on the mind. Unless you’ve made it from scratch, the next time you’re enjoying your food a bit too much, whether at a restaurant or out of a box, maybe it’s time to ask why. 

NAAZISH YARKHAN (www.writersstudio.us) is a writer, editor and a college essay coach and has contributed to NPR, PRI and more.
Halal on Campus

By Alia Shalabi

When choosing a college, students consider location, programs offered, size, cost, reputation... dining hall food? Even for those who require a special diet, dining hall food options are not usually at the top of the list. Shouldn’t all schools provide balanced meals all their students can eat, especially those schools which require you to purchase a meal plan if living on campus?
Today, more and more people have to or choose to adhere to strict diets. Whether it be from allergies, an autoimmune disease, animal welfare, or religion, the number of Americans who need to read food labels before consuming goods is steadily growing. According to the *Top Trends in Prepared Foods in 2017* report, six percent of the United States population now identifies as vegan. A study published in May 2017 in *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, 3.6 percent of Americans have food allergies or intolerances.

In a study published in July 2017, Pew Research Center estimates that there are currently 3.45 million Muslims in the United States, who like some other communities, have certain dietary restrictions. The halal food market in America is an over 20 billion dollar industry. Surely college students can be included in those numbers. So, why would it be such a surprise that American colleges would offer halal food options?

In 1999, Omer Bin Abdullah’s son was a freshman living on campus at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, popularly known as Virginia Tech. His son complained to him about the lack of food options. He suggested his son take up the matter with the food director. Higher education is expensive enough, then add in the cost of books, housing, and meal plans...you definitely want to get the most bang for your buck. After all, it’s unfair to pay for what you know you cannot get full use of. So Abdullah’s son requested a refund of his meal plan money. Unfortunately, it was met with a rejection. The school said they could not do it and, furthermore, they argued that they’d had Muslim students for decades without this ever being an issue. “We helped our son draft a response. If the Muslims students in the past were unobservant or docile, that does not invalidate the necessity of serving halal foods to Muslims,” says Abdullah.

And guess what? After some back and forth and some research done by both sides on how to solve this problem, the school ended up creating a halal window in one of their dining halls with a dedicated new stove and cookware.

Today, Virginia Tech offers halal food options in multiple dining halls and even a campus food truck. It appears from their website that any food items made with fresh, unbreaded chicken breast or thigh meat are made using certified halal chicken and are noted as such on the ingredients/nutritional information.

**Instead of focusing on the “why not befores,” it seems more beneficial to focus on the “going forwards...” More and more colleges have Muslim Student Associations now, which is one really helpful way of getting the Muslim voice heard and recognized.**

Abdullah’s son was somewhat of a pioneer, at least at Virginia Tech. Why was he the first one to approach their administration regarding halal food? Instead of focusing on the “why not befores,” it seems more beneficial to focus on the “going forwards.” And that seems to be exactly what today’s young people are doing.

More and more colleges have Muslim Student Associations now, which is one really helpful way of getting the Muslim voice heard and recognized. While MSAs in North America were first formed in the 1960s, they didn’t start to take shape in the way we now recognize them, as groups of mostly American Muslims who organize prayers, lectures, discussions, and charitable and social events, and seek to unify Muslim students from different cultural backgrounds, until the 1990s. MSAs across America are doing great work in their communities, not just for Muslims but for everyone, which really creates a positive image and fosters an atmosphere where others may be more open to accommodating their needs.

It was a brave effort on Abdullah’s son’s part, being just one person bold enough to express halal food options as a need, not a want, especially in the face of the reaction he initially received from the school. Many people are not that
bold; there is truth to the saying “safety in numbers.” So, when you have the support of a group of Muslims, such as an MSA, it does become easier to approach the situation of Muslim needs on campus.

And that’s what really helped get halal meals on the menu at Washington University in St. Louis. When Nadeem Siddiqui got there in 2008 as the resident district manager for Bon Appétit Management Company, Wash U’s dining services partner, he says they had a halal food program a few years back, but it wasn’t very successful and disappeared altogether. So, he started working with the students in the MSA to build a halal food program that would last. It took about a year for he and the students to build a solid program that would be sustainable and financially viable. “To maintain financial stability,” Siddiqui says, “you have to approach it in a way where halal is not just for Muslims, it’s for everybody.”

And that is what he and the students did. The MSA put together a strategic plan that explained, firstly, why halal? When asked that question, “Why?” there was not always a quick answer from the students. “If you can’t explain [why], your program’s not going to go anywhere,” says Siddiqui. If the answer is, “because I want it,” you likely won’t receive much support.

The next part of the students’ plan was ways that the university could support the “why.” They presented their well-thought out plan to the student union leadership and from there to the chancellor’s office and then to the dean of students. It really became a group effort. Of course the chef who would be running the halal food station had to be involved and educated on not only running a strictly halal food station, but also in sourcing the raw materials. The chef had to understand the logistics from purchasing to delivering the final product. “You can’t just grill a chicken breast and put it on a plate; it’s not going to sell. Nobody wants to eat that,” says Siddiqui. The food actually has to taste good! So, the chef is really instrumental in making those halal items desirable. There needs to be time spent building tasty recipes. Siddiqui believes that’s been achieved at Wash U. “There’s more students who eat [at the halal dining station] who are non-Muslims.”

With a strong plan, it became easier to say that the halal meal program would become a part of the university, “not just for one year or two years,” says Siddiqui, it would be “part of their DNA.”

The dedicated halal dining center at Wash U opened in 2010 and is currently still running successfully. And according to current Wash U junior Amal Haque, the university is opening a new dining hall on campus in the coming years, “and they intend to add another halal food station on campus in response to the Muslim students who asked for it.” In the meantime, you can visit the WUrld Fusion dining center in the evenings daily for delicious Chicken Vindaloo, Chicken Tikka Masala, or Peri Peri Chicken, among other menu items.

At Columbia University, students can elect to enroll in Columbia’s Halal Meal Plan. Those enrolled will receive a “halal” sticker to be placed on their student ID. Of course, students who don’t enroll in the program can still eat the halal food offered in the dining halls. According to Columbia Dining, “Only one percent of students on a meal plan self-identify that they adhere to a halal diet, but they are not required to register.”

The number one way to effect change is to speak up. In any situation, you will not get what you want if nobody knows what that is. If you want halal food because you only follow a halal diet, you must make your university aware.

Columbia Dining first started offering halal meals during Ramadan at the request of students over a decade ago. Halal meals were gradually incorporated into the menu until they became a daily offering. In fact, they recently began using halal bone-in chicken for all hot-food stations on their main line. Since Columbia purchases their halal bone-in chicken locally, it also supports their sustainable buying philosophy. While they do have a separate halal station that serves hot meals daily, “we try to mirror the daily offerings at both the halal and the main station, so that there isn’t a significant difference in what is being offered to students.”

Boston University Dining Services also sources all of their whole chickens, chicken breasts, and chicken thighs from local farms that are certified humane. That wasn’t always the case, of course. The evolution of the halal food offerings at Boston University is similar to that of Columbia: it started out simply and then grew as requests increased.

At Boston, as feedback for halal offerings increased, dining services began to source more halal products to include in the everyday menu. The current halal offerings are available at every dining room at every meal period.
Similarly, according to Stanford University’s website, “All of the chicken and beef, including the hamburger patties, served in the dining halls are certified halal.” This all harkens back to Siddiqui’s point that, “Halal is for everybody.”

One thing to keep in mind, however, is whether or not these dining facilities take care to ensure there is no cross contamination. All of the meat may be halal, but that doesn’t mean the final product will be halal. A grilled halal chicken breast smothered in wine sauce would certainly not be considered halal. So, don’t get too comfortable just because your school may only use halal meats. This is the benefit of having a dedicated kitchen space for halal items only.

At Wash U, Siddiqui emphasized the importance of a separate kitchen space and getting the one option to be as perfect as can be, meaning consistent and credible. He thinks schools should feel comfortable opening up those kitchens to patrons and the chef should be able to speak to them freely and openly and honestly about the process and everything that goes into preparing those halal meals. “Credibility is important,” emphasizes Siddiqui. “Without consistency and reliability, the program would never be what it needs to be.”

Siddiqui is currently the Executive Director for Faculty Student Association at Stony Brook University. He says the halal program there was set in motion almost 25 years ago by the Muslim chaplain, Sanaa Nadim. A full Halal NY station just opened on campus a year ago, and while Siddiqui says he helped and gave input on a thing or two, “The credit really goes to [Nadim]. She has been fighting for halal food for 24 years and this is her baby.” Siddiqui continues, “She has really brought us to the next level.”

For some, having a credible halal dedicated kitchen and utensils is more important than having multiple dining halls offering halal food. For others, being able to eat just about anything from the dining halls knowing all of the beef and chicken is certified halal is preferred. In either case, you won’t get what you want unless you ask for it. The number one way to effect change is to speak up. In any situation, you will not get what you want if nobody knows what that is. If you want halal food because you only follow a halal diet, you must make your university aware. You are likely not the only student on campus. Talk to your Muslim Student Association about approaching the administrators in charge. If you don’t have an MSA on campus, collaborate with other Muslims at the school. Even if you don’t know a single other Muslim student living on campus, it really never hurts to share your wants and needs with your university. Put together a solid plan of action and, if you’re a halal consumer, ask for it!

ALIA SHALABI loves the color green, nachos, and watching way too much television. She lives in the suburbs of Chicago with her husband and three children.

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