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Waiting to Eat Dairy after Eating Meat

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How long must one actually wait after eating meat before eating dairy?

Must one wait before consuming dairy if one merely chewed meat but didn't swallow it?

One of the most common dietary restrictions one encounters in daily life, even when surrounded with kosher food, is the restriction on eating dairy after consuming meat. Indeed, one of the great Jewish phobias is “fleishigophobia,” the fear of becoming “*fleishig*” (lit., meaty; the term used for one who has eaten meat and cannot eat dairy) and not being allowed to eat dairy (e.g., a coffee with milk). This article will explore the source of this restriction, its details, and the halacha of various common scenarios that arise.

The background: In three places (Shemos 23:19; *ibid.* 34:26; Devarim 14:21), the Torah states, “You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk.” The Talmud (116a) explains that these three verses prohibit three things: One may not cook milk and meat together, one may not consume milk and meat that were cooked together, and one may not benefit from milk and meat that were cooked together. Although on a *diOrayso* (Torah) level, the prohibition is limited to cooking (including baking or roasting) milk and meat together, eating such a combination or benefiting from it, Chazal extended the prohibition to eating the two together even though they are not cooked together, as well. This is evident from the Mishna (Chullin 103b) which states that two people may not eat at the same table if one is eating dairy while the other is eating meat, out of a concern that they will share their food with each other. In addition, on a *diOrayso* level, only meat from a kosher species of animal is included (Chullin 113a). There is a dispute between Rabi Akiva and Rabi Yosi Haglili if the prohibition is limited to domesticated animals or extends even to wild animals (*ibid.*); the halacha follows Rabi Akiva, who says that only domesticated animals are included (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 87:3). Birds and fish are not included. Rabbinically, however, meat of wild animals and poultry, due to their similarity to the prohibited meats, are included in the prohibition (Chullin 104a). This Rabbinic prohibition, however, is limited to not eating the milk-meat combination; cooking and benefit, though, are permitted (Rambam Ma’achalos Asuros 9:4).

The source: The Gemara (Chullin 104b-105a) teaches that one may eat meat after eating dairy. However, one must check his hands in a lit area to ensure they are free of dairy residue; if it is at night (i.e., there is not sufficient light available), one must wash his hands. In addition, Bais Hillel and Bais Shammai both say that before eating meat, one must wipe and rinse his mouth¹. The Gemara rules that “wiping” means eating any food besides for flour, dates and vegetables, because these are soft foods which will stick to the interior of the mouth rather than clear out any dairy residue.

The Gemara (*ibid.* 105a) cites Rav Chisda as ruling that one who eats meat is forbidden from eating cheese afterwards, but one may eat meat after eating cheese. A bit further, the Gemara says that Mar Ukva stated, “With respect to this matter, I am like vinegar the son of wine compared to my father. For my father, when he ate meat today, would not eat dairy until the next day. I, however, do not eat [dairy] during this [meat] meal, but I do eat it with the next meal.”

It thus emerges that there is a prohibition against eating dairy after eating meat. Less clear is how long one must wait between the two; the only indication is Mar Ukva’s statement about waiting until the next meal. Tosafos (*ibid.* s.v. *lisudasa*) says that Mar Ukva’s intent is not that one must wait the normal time between the morning and evening meals². Rather, one may eat dairy immediately after one recites a

bracha acharona after the meat meal. A number of other Rishonim echo this ruling (see Darkei Moshe Yoreh Deah 89:5 for a listing). The Darkei Moshe (*ibid.*) cites the Hagahus Sha’arei Dura (76:2) who says that while many are lenient and follow this opinion, they make a “compromise” and wait one hour after completing the meat meal and reciting the *bracha acharona*. The Hagahus Shaarei Dura continues that while there is no clear reason for this hour, one needn’t protest the practice of waiting such a short time, since Tosafos and others are lenient. However, he continues, the *tzinu’im* (those who are careful with mitzvah observance) abstain from dairy for the period of time between the morning and evening meal.

The Darkei Moshe debates whether this hour begins after actually completing the meal and reciting *bracha acharona*, as indicated by the language of the Hagahus Shaarei Dura and others, or whether it begins from when one stopped eating meat, so long as one completes the meal and recites a *bracha acharona*. The Darkei Moshe leans toward the lenient side of waiting from when one stopped actually eating meat, and indeed rules this way in the Rema³ (ad loc.:1).

While it seems from the above sources that the period of one hour has no actual source, as merely ending the meat meal and beginning a dairy meal suffices, the Pri Chadash (ad loc.:6) says that it is based upon a Zohar (cited in Bais Yosef Orach Chaim 173) that one must not eat meat and dairy at the same meal or within one hour of each other.

The halacha: The Rambam rules that one who ate meat or poultry may not eat dairy until waiting the period of time of when the next meal would take place, which is “like six hours.”

The Tur (Yoreh Deah 89:1) echoes this ruling, saying one must wait the period between the morning and evening meals, which is six hours.

The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 89:1) rules that one must wait six hours. However, the Rema cites the lenient opinions that one may eat dairy immediately after concluding the meat meal and making a *bracha acharona*. The Rema continues that the custom in “these countries” (Poland and nearby eastern European countries, comprised mainly of Ashkenazic Jews) is to wait one hour. The Rema notes that there are those who are particular to wait six hours, and concludes that it is proper to do so.

While Sefardim generally follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and thus must wait six hours, Ashkenazim generally follow the ruling of the Rema, and so, in theory, one hour ought to suffice. Nonetheless, most Ashkenazic Jews follow the Rema’s stringent custom of waiting six hours.

However, there are Jews from certain European countries who rely upon the more lenient custom. There are some Jews, particularly of Dutch extract, who wait one hour, as per the Rema, while some Jews, particularly of German descent, wait three hours. The source for waiting three hours may be based on Rabbeinu Yerucham in his work Issur Viheter (39), where he says that the period between meals is three hours.

Halachic authorities (Chochmas Adam 40:13; Aruch Hashulchan 89:7) make it clear that one whose traditional custom is to wait six hours may not simply change his custom to the more lenient custom.

the day. Breakfast as a full meal did not exist, though the Talmud (Bava Metzria 107b) encourages one to eat some bread and drink some water in the morning.

³ Darkei Moshe and Rema are both authored by Rabbi Moshe Isserles.

¹ Drinking something achieves “rinsing.”

² In Talmudic times, a large late morning meal was eaten, and a second meal later in

Nonetheless, because the Ashkenazic custom to wait six hours is more custom than actual halacha, as stated by the Rema, there is room to be lenient and wait just one hour in extenuating circumstances (Chochmas Adam 40:13; Aruch Hashulchan Yoreh Deah 89:7), such as an ill person or someone with special dietary needs; a halachic authority should be consulted when such situations arise.

There are two lenient approaches to the six-hour time. Rabbi Aharon Kotler noted the Rambam's language "like six hours," instead of simply "six hours," and ruled that waiting most of the six hours - more than 5 ½ hours - is sufficient. This is the custom of Rabbi Kotler's yeshiva, Beth Medrash Govoha; lunch is a meat meal, while dinner, a dairy meal, is served approximately 5 ½ hours later!

Another even more lenient approach interprets the Rambam's wording to mean waiting *into* the sixth hour, or slightly more than five hours.

If one wishes to adopt the more lenient views of six hours despite his more stringent family custom, a halachic authority must be consulted.

Most halachic authorities rule that the six hours are counted from when one stopped eating meat (as discussed by the aforementioned Darkei Moshe). There is a minority view of the Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.:4) that one must wait from the meat meal's end and may not even begin a dairy meal until the waiting period ends, even though no dairy is being eaten at the start of the meal. The Aruch Hashulchan explains that the enactment was to wait between meals, not between eating meat and dairy. However, the widespread custom is to follow the lenient view.

There is an interesting debate regarding an uncertainty when one stopped eating meat. Normally, one may be lenient when faced with an uncertainty regarding a Rabbinic restriction. However, there are a number of exceptions, including a prohibition that is a *davar sheyesh lo matirin*, something which will eventually become permissible later. The Yad Yehuda (89:1) rules that one must be stringent and begin the six hours from the latest possible time meat was eaten, explaining that since it will eventually be permissible to eat dairy, this is a *davar sheyesh lo matirin*. Darkei Teshuva (Yoreh Deah 89:5), however, disagrees, as a *davar sheyesh lo matirin* is only when the thing one wishes to do, if done now, cannot be repeated later (e.g., eating a specific food item which, once eaten, will no longer be present to eat later). In this case, however, one can eat dairy now and again later, and so it does not qualify as a *davar sheyesh lo matirin*, and one may calculate the six hours from the earliest time he may have finished eating meat. A halachic authority should be consulted for a practical ruling.

What type of "eating" requires waiting: There is a dispute as to the reasoning for the required waiting period after eating meat. Rashi (Chullin 104b s.v. *assur*) says that because meat is fatty, some residue remains in the mouth and the flavor lasts. The Rambam (ibid. 10:28) explains that meat remains between the teeth that would not be removed through the standard rinsing and "wiping" of the mouth.

The Tur (Yoreh Deah 89:1) notes several differences between these two approaches. According to Rashi, if one merely chewed meat, but did not actually eat it, one needn't wait⁴. According to the Rambam, though, if one chews the meat, it gets caught in the teeth, and so one must wait.

On the other hand, the Rambam must hold that meat still stuck in the teeth after the waiting period is no longer considered meat, and so one would not be required to remove it before eating dairy. According to Rashi, however, there is no reason to say this is true, and so if one knows he has meat in his teeth after the waiting period, it must be removed before eating dairy.

The Tur concludes that it is proper to be stringent according to both opinions, and so any meat still in one's teeth must be removed before eating dairy⁵, and merely

⁴ This is difficult to understand, since the grease of the meat will remain in the mouth whether one swallows it or not. Some have explained that Rashi means to say that the fatty meat that one swallows will cause residue and flavor to come back up from the stomach (such as via a burp), which is only relevant if one actually swallowed the meat.

⁵ In addition, one must rinse his mouth (Rema ibid.) and "wipe" with a non-soft food (Shach ibid.:4). If one swallowed the meat stuck in his teeth, he needn't restart the

waiting meat is enough to require waiting before eating dairy. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) rules accordingly. However, Rabi Akiva Eiger (ad loc. s.v. *achar*) and the Yad Yehuda (ad loc.:1) say that one need wait only one hour after merely chewing meat. Rabbi Eiger bases this on the Rema's language, as he says that the custom to wait six hours is for one who "eats" meat, which seems to imply that the lenient period of one hour suffices for merely chewing it.

If one placed meat in his mouth but didn't chew or swallow it, no waiting would be required (Darkei Teshuva ibid.:10; Hagahus Maharshak to Pri Megadim 89:1), though one must rinse and "wipe" his mouth with a non-soft food before eating dairy.

What meat foods require waiting: The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) rules that poultry and wild animal meat are included in the restriction against eating dairy after their consumption. The Rema (ibid.:3) rules that meat fat is the same as the meat itself, gravy or broth would be included in this ruling, as well. The Rema further states that the custom is to wait after eating food that was cooked with meat, even if no meat was actually consumed. However, continues the Rema, food cooked in a *fleishig* pot but without actual meat does not require waiting. Thus, if one ate a potato from a stew that contains meat, he would need to wait before eating dairy. Potatoes cooked in a clean meat pot, though, would not require waiting.

The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc.:14), citing the Pri Chadash (ad loc.:13), rules that if one merely tasted food cooked with meat but did not intend to engage in actual eating (though he swallowed the food), he needn't wait. However, if this food has gravy with it, one must wait, as we are concerned that the gravy has actual meat in it (Pri Megadim Mishbitzos Zahav ad loc.:5).

If one tasted a meat or chicken soup without intent to engage in "eating" but swallowed the soup, a halachic authority should be consulted if one must wait and for how long (see Taz ad loc.:5 and Me'or Hachaim 2:6).

If one ate pareve food fried in oil that was previously used to fry meat (e.g., pareve french fries fried in a deep fryer used to fry chicken), but this oil was used merely for convenience and without intent to infuse the meat flavor into the pareve food, some contemporary authorities do not require waiting; a halachic authority should be consulted (see Shach ad loc.:19; Yad Yehuda ad loc.:5; Elya Rabba Orach Chaim 173:4; Badei Hashulchan 89:89).

Similarly, it happens sometimes that a small amount of meat gravy or the like falls into pareve food (e.g., one has pareve potatoes on the same plate as a piece of meat, and a bit of gravy ends up in the potatoes). In most cases, assuming there is no significant flavor from the meat and one did not intend to add this flavor, some authorities are lenient and do not require waiting.

(In both of these scenarios, however, one must not eat the food with dairy or use dairy or pareve utensils for this food, as there is actual meat flavor in the food. It is possible that the meat is nullified in sixty parts of the pareve food, in which case it would remain pareve; a halachic authority must be consulted to determine if nullification occurred.)

What dairy foods may not be eaten: Dairy itself is, of course, forbidden during the waiting period. Food cooked with dairy (e.g., pizza crust or potatoes cooked with cheese) is also forbidden (Hagahus Rabi Akiva Eiger Yoreh Deah 89 s.v. *vivesh*, citing Maharshak). However, pareve food cooked in a dairy pot without actual dairy may be eaten.

An additional group of foods that may be problematic after eating meat is sharp pareve foods cut with a dairy knife. Sharp foods that are cut with a knife have a special ability to absorb flavor from the knife. The parameters of this halacha are complex and much-debated, and so a halachic authority should be consulted.

In conclusion, the much-feared waiting period between eating meat and dairy indeed has a broad range of application, but also offers situations where one may be lenient. When in doubt, it is a good idea to consult with a halachic authority.

waiting period (see Me'or Hachaim 2:8), though one should avoid initially swallowing it.

Points to Ponder

Must a child under bar mitzvah age also wait the full period between meat and milk?

What is the halacha if one licked his fingers and realized there was some meat gravy on them?

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