



## EPISODE 25 - A Review of Religious Dietary Practices

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The overhead pager announced that Join Commission was there. It was our turn. The surveyors were doing a tracer which is when they pick some patients off the list of admitted patients - usually randomly - and follow that patient from admission to where they're currently at. A lot of the things they look at are nursing and physician documentation but they also look at nutrition. Of course they do because nutrition is a critical part of patient care and treatment. Sometimes they'll ask to see the diet order of a patient on the unit and then come down to the kitchen and want to see the meal history for the patient. They might want to see how the kitchen works such as how we prepare and deliver the trays to that patients. During this specific tracer, the surveyor asked about the dietitian documentation. The patient was on a Consistent Carbohydrate, Renal diet and the surveyor wanted to see if the patient was educated. The patient thankfully had been. Then she wanted to see if the education was done in the patients preferred language. Documenting translation should be in the note so you can easily speak to it someone asks. On top of that, she also wanted to know if we had accommodated their cultural food preferences. She asked what type of food we offered and what the process was if someone didn't like what was on the menu. Were food preferences taken and accommodated for the patient. Fortunately, she was happy with what she saw. This surveyor was great. She took the time to explain why she was asking these things. The goal for any hospital is to treat people and send them home to heal when they're stable and it's safe. People heal best in their home environment. And in order for people to take care of themselves, they need to know what to do to manage their situation on their own which of course includes nutrition. Providing education and information in someone's preferred language is good patient care and it shows the patient is respected, cared for, and seen.

[Music and Intro]

Well hey there. Today we're talking about cultural foods which is something that will come up regardless of where you work. This world is beautiful and full of diverse populations and so many fabulous cultures. As dietitians, you'll have the opportunity to work with people from all different backgrounds and having an understanding and respect for other cultures will help your clients and patients feel truly cared for so they can lead their best life. Which I believe is why we're here. That's the beauty of dietitians.

I wanted to give a shout out to Madison Rochford who just passed the RD Exam. It was a long journey for her to get to this point so she is so excited to finally close that chapter and move on with her career. Such an amazing

feeling. I couldn't be happier for her. She's super ambitious and excited to use the RD credential. I would be too. I remember it being such a surreal feeling. Madison, great job my friend. You did it. Congratulations. Thanks for sharing your fabulous news with me so I can share it with all these amazing listeners.

I love the content of this episode because it's pertinent. I wouldn't be surprised if you're asked something about cultural foods on the exam. But beyond the exam, you'll definitely work with people from different cultures because that's the world we live in.

Throughout the years, I've worked with so many patients from different backgrounds and learned so much. I'm really grateful for those moments. I want to review some cultural foods and specific diets that might show up on the exam and will definitely show up in your career. So let's go over some of those so you feel prepared and confident to nail those questions. Now I might miss some diets because this world is big and beautiful with so many cultures but I wanted to touch on some of the common ones we see fairly regularly.

And I want to say before I get started that even within the cultures you're gonna learn today, there are variations. For example, I know many Jewish people who loosely follow a Kosher Diet but never fast. While others follow a strict Kosher diet, and celebrate all the holidays and fast on Yom Kippur. So the information I share today is the traditional information but like anything in life, it's not always black and white. There's often a grey area. What I've learned is the best way to proceed when you aren't certain is to simply ask. Ask what foods someone will and will not eat and be respectful. Can't go wrong with that.

And something to keep in mind. Joint Commission could ask about the demographic at the facility you work at if you work in Food Service or Clinical and have any oversight of the menu. The reason for that is because the menu should be mindful and represent the demographic in your community. You also need to make sure the nutritionals of the foods provided on your menu meet the nutritional needs of your average patient. So knowing this information is really important for multiple reasons. It's a regulatory thing but more than that, it shows representation for the people living in your community.

## Halal

Ok. So let's get started with a Halal diet which is followed by Muslims. The halal diet includes foods that are considered to be clean. This means that foods such as pork and pork products, carnivorous animals, and birds of prey such as raptors are not allowed on the diet. Birds of prey eat smaller animals such as mice, and rats so they're not allowed. Meat and poultry are allowed however, the animal needs to be slaughtered a specific way in order for the meat to be Halal. Alcohol and other intoxicants aren't allowed but coffee and tea can be consumed

although it may not be allowed for some people. So again, ask and see if the person will drink coffee or tea. I've had some patients that are more liberal with the Halal diet especially when admitted to the hospital and I've had others that strictly follow the diet. So you never know.

Ok so now that we've gone over what is allowed, let's go over some potential questions that just might show up on the exam or concepts you should know. So let's say you're asked what foods are NOT allowed on a halal diet and these are the 4 options to choose from:

- 1) Grilled Cheese Sandwich with steamed broccoli
- 2) Tofu with rice and carrots
- 3) Ham Sandwich with a side salad and jello for dessert
- 4) Cereal with milk, banana and a hard-boiled egg

So with these options, the ham sandwich contains pork products. Also the jello contains gelatin which is made from pork products. There's gelatin that's free of animal products and would be allowed on the halal diet but for the exam, if you're asked about gelatin, assume the product contains pork products which are not allowed on the halal diet. Imitation products such as bacon can be included.

You might be asked about sauces. Knowing the ingredients and what type of sauce will help you answer the question correctly. For example, if any of the dressings or sauces contain alcohol that's cooked down, it's not allowed. When in doubt, take the more conservative approach and offer something that's not questionable. To make things easier, there's several symbols that let you know a food is Halal so when possible, having products on hand for people who follow a Halal diet especially if you don't work in a kitchen that prepares halal foods is a great option for these patients.

I wanted to quickly talk about Ramadan which is an important month in Islamic faith. It's a holy month of fasting. During Ramadan, fasting takes place from sunrise to sunset. So food needs to be consumed after the sun sets in the evening and before the sun comes up in the morning. Eating and drinking isn't allowed in the day. I had a friend who was Muslim and had the opportunity to celebrate the feast at the end of Ramadan. Everyone came together. There was so much love and laughter, joy and happiness. And yes, lots of food. It was a really beautiful experience and something I'd never experienced before. So if you have a client who's celebrating Ramadan, the timing of food consumed in a 24 hour period needs to be considered and could impact their menu if that's something you're helping them with.

## Kosher

Let's move on to the Kosher diet which is very similar to the Halal diet. Actually, I've had patients who'll consume Kosher meals when Halal meals aren't available so there are similarities. The Kosher diet needs to follow the Kosher dietary laws.

Just like with Halal foods, Kosher foods are identified with a symbol. The symbol for a Kosher diet is a U with a circle around it. Kosher means pure or clean so because of this, certain foods that aren't seen as clean, aren't allowed. So what are those foods? Well, foods not allowed on a Kosher diet are pork, horses, rabbits, or shellfish. Other meats are allowed such as cow, goats, bison, and sheep. But they need to be slaughtered a particular way and must be blessed by a rabbi in order to be Kosher. Fish that have fins and scales are allowed. Shellfish isn't but fish is. Kosher dairy products must come from a kosher animal meaning an animal that's allowed according to kosher law. So that means milk, cheese, yogurt and milk derivatives are allowed if they come from goats, cow, bison, and sheep. Eggs are also allowed but they can't have any visible blood in the egg.

A big rule with Kosher dietary law is that meat and dairy can't be served together. But beyond meat and dairy not being allowed to be served together, with Kosher law, plates, utensils and cooking ware such as pots and pans that prepare meat and dairy need to be kept separate. This means that plates that serve meat have to be washed and reused for meat. They can't be cleaned and then used for serving dairy products. So a Kosher kitchen would have separate dishes just for meat and another set of dishes for dairy and they can't be mixed up even after being washed. Also, in order for a kitchen to designate themselves as Kosher, they'd need to follow all Kosher laws. Keep in mind that dairy is allowed. It just can't be served or prepared with meat products and the utensils used need to be kept separate. Dairy can be eaten 1 to 6 hours after meats been eaten.

So let's go over an example. If you're asked on the exam to identify foods that aren't Kosher, an example would be spaghetti with meat sauce, sprinkled with cheddar cheese or parmesan cheese on top. What would be allowed would be something like Mac n Cheese with green beans and carrots. The dish doesn't have any meat so the dairy is fine to eat. The vegetables so the pasta, green beans and carrots are neutral. So what do I mean by neutral? Well, neutral foods can be served with meat and dairy. They're called Pareve and these neutral foods include fruit, vegetables, pasta, eggs, grains, and juice. Just like with the Halal diet, imitation products such as imitation bacon and crab can be included in the diet because they follow Kosher law. If a Rabbi were to visit a kitchen, they might ask about the dishes used in the kitchen and they might also ask about the combination foods to make sure that meat and dairy aren't mixed. Many meals are combined such as casserole and pasta dishes. If Meatloaf has any milk or dairy products, it wouldn't be allowed. So someone following a kosher diet might ask about the combination foods to make sure they're appropriate for the Kosher diet. Also, many meal

ordering systems in the kitchen have meals that are programmed for any allergens and can also be coded as non-compliant for specific diet orders such as the Kosher diet.

### **Seventh Day Adventists**

Moving on to the Seventh Day Adventists. There's a large population of Seventh Day Adventists in Loma Linda California. This is one of the reasons Loma Linda is a Blue Zone which is where a lot of centenarians or people who live to be 100 years old or older live. So incredible. Dietary practices and lifestyle choices are a huge reason for their longevity. They look at food and beverages as a way to preserve their health and a way to honor God. So overindulging is not part of their lifestyle or beliefs. And taking care of ones body in the living is extremely important. Seventh Day Adventists don't drink caffeine or alcohol. Also pork products are excluded. As a general rule, they follow a vegetarian or plant based diet but like with anything, some people may allow meat and fish as long as there's no pork. Low-fat dairy products and eggs are allowed. Again, if you have a patient who follows a Seventh Day Adventist diet, you can ask and see what they'll eat. A lot of times, when they're admitted to the hospital, they'll indicate what foods they won't eat and those can be added to their food preferences. They might ask for a vegetarian diet or a vegan diet if they don't eat any dairy products. So if you're asked a question on the exam about what someone who's a Seventh Day Adventist would eat, find the option that does NOT have caffeine, alcohol, or pork. Depending on the options, meat and fish might also have to be excluded. Eliminate the obviously wrong options and work your way through the other options.

### **Roman Catholics**

Moving on to Roman Catholic dietary laws. They consume fish on Fridays during Lent. Also, fish is served on Ash Wednesday. I've always worked places that serve fish on Friday's throughout the year. Some people like fish on Fridays and that way, when lent comes around, the menu is already compliant for the diet. So this is something you could do if fish is available to you and you're planning a menu. Even if someone isn't Roman Catholic, they can have fish on Friday if they like it. Red meat isn't allowed on Friday's during lent because fish is served instead. Need to keep in mind that some people who follow the Roman Catholic faith might fast similar to Jewish and Muslim faith.

### **Buddhism**

Ok. So Buddhist avoid animal products in general and are often vegetarian. For Buddhists, plant-based foods are recommended and are viewed as the most wholesome foods to eat. They may eat fish from time to time but it depends on the individual. Monks also practice fasting. Unlike other religions, alcohol is allowed with this religion. So if you're asked on the exam what dietary law or culture allows alcohol and your options are Kosher, Halal, Seventh Day Adventist and Buddhist, the answer would be Buddhists.

Hinduism - Let's talk a little about Hinduism. In Hindu culture, beef is not eaten because cow's are seen as a sacred animal. Other animals such as pork, fish and chicken are also avoided. Because of this, most Hindu's are vegetarian. Dairy and eggs are typically allowed. Having said that, some may choose to be vegan and follow a strict plant-based diet.

Mormons don't have a lot of restrictions. All foods are allowed however, they don't allow alcohol or caffeine. So coffee and tea aren't allowed.

So I wanted to do a quick reminder of some other dietary restrictions.

People who follow a gluten-free diet usually have celiac disease or they have a gluten-sensitivity. Wheat contains gluten so that means foods that contain wheat can't be eaten. Also Rye, Barley and Oats (unless specified to be gluten-free) aren't allowed. A lot of sauces contain gluten because a lot of sauces have soy sauce as a base. And soy sauce contains wheat. You can get gluten-free soy sauce but this is something you have to be cautious of if you work in food service.

So I mentioned Hindu's tend to be vegetarian. If you work in foodservice, you have to look at the diet manual to see how vegetarian is coded because there are different types of vegetarian.

- Lacto-ovo vegetarians don't eat meat but they allow milk and eggs.
- Lacto vegetarians don't eat meat or eggs but they are allowed to eat dairy products and drink milk.
- Ovo vegetarians don't eat dairy products or drink cow's milk but they eat eggs. People who are ovo vegetarians will consume milk alternative products instead such as almond, oat and coconut milks, yogurts and cheese.
- Pescatarians eat fish but won't eat meat. They may or may not eat other animal products such as eggs and milk. It depends on how strict the person is with the foods they will and won't allow.
- And lastly, Vegans don't eat any animal products and many vegans also won't eat honey because it's made from bees. Anything with gelatin isn't allowed which means jell-o, marshmallows and gummy candies that contain gelatin are eliminated from the diet. Unless the food uses a gelatin alternative. There are gelatin free marshmallows and gummies available on the market that vegans can eat.

I wanted to mention one more thing. I've seen this so many times working in a hospital. Many patients will come in and say they're allergic to milk so it's added to their chart and the meal ordering system will restrict ALL foods

that contain milk. When you talk to the patient, they'll say, "I can have foods with milk but I'm lactose intolerant so I can't drink milk". But when milk is added as an allergy, it creates a lot of problems because a lot of foods have milk in them like pancakes and scallop potatoes. There's so many foods but those two came to mind. So we have to get them to remove the milk allergy so they can get more foods. A milk allergy is super restrictive. So keep in mind that someone who has a milk protein allergy is very different than someone with lactose intolerance. So make sure you always ask and clarify.

So that's a breakdown of religious dietary practices. You now have what you need to not only nail these types of questions on the RD Exam but also be able to help your clients and patients with these restrictions.

Before we go, I wanted to take a minute to share something really important. If you're feeling nervous about taking the exam for the first time or if you've taken the exam and didn't pass. It can feel lonely. If you didn't pass, it's so frustrating and disappointing. And it's super easy to spiral down a rabbit hole into negative self-talk. So if that's how you're feeling, I want you to really hear me. The RD exam doesn't define you. It's not a reflection of the type of dietitian you're gonna be. I know several RD's who didn't pass the RD exam the first or even the second time and they're now amazing dietitians. Test taking isn't easy for everyone. And one test doesn't define who you are or the skills you have. It doesn't define how amazing you'll be or who you'll be able to reach once you become a dietitian. It also doesn't change the impact you're already having in this world. So if you're struggling getting across the finish line, please hear me when I say this isn't a representation of who you are or the type of RD you'll be. And know that you have people cheering you on. Wishing the absolute best for you. That's why I'm here, creating episodes to help you along the way and at the very least, help you feel motivated and inspired to keep going. So you have a cheerleader and RD who cares about you and wants the absolute best for you. Don't give up. Keep going. You'll get there and when you do, it's gonna be AMAZING!!

Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time.

[Music and Outro]