

10 TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING ON PASSOVER



I often get a number of messages this time of year with clients, friends or family at a Kosher grocery store holding up a picture of a food product and asking me if I “approve” it as a healthy food choice for Pesach (Passover). This year, there has been a lot less of that; whether people have too many other things to worry about because of Covid-19 or they simply aren’t spending as much time at the grocery store, I don’t know but I actually miss those messages! Some of them were sent to make me laugh: “How much of this cottonseed oil do I have to consume before I become genetically modified?” or “If I cross out the bad ingredients on this one with a Sharpie, can I use it?”

Messages from people trying to lose weight went along the lines of “If I promise to eat organic spelt matzah can I also buy this 7 layer colored chocolate cake – how bad could it be, it’s made with eggs?” while others genuinely want to know how it’s possible to eat healthy with the current products available, such as “Where do I find almond milk for Pesach that doesn’t taste disgusting?” (Answer: You can’t; it doesn’t exist).

As I discuss [in this post](#), now more than ever we need to make sure we stay as healthy as possible and don’t consume things that will further weaken our immune system. Not because it will stave off a pandemic but rather because if you do get the virus, your immune system will be strong and you will recover with mild symptoms.

Eating healthy on Passover is definitely more challenging than other times during the year. Many of our favorite healthy/organic brands are not Kosher for Passover. There is a SO much pre-packaged ready made “convenient” food

that we are tempted to skip making the meals and snacks from scratch and buy them instead, looking away at the unhealthy ingredients and tons of sugar we know are in there. 2 weeks, we tell ourselves; how much damage can it do? I believe that if you have made a commitment to a healthier diet and lifestyle then it's important to ignore those "convenient foods" as much as we can and make things from scratch with whole REAL foods and ingredients.

Now that all of us are at home and cooking for our families, we can get the kids involved and make the Pesach meal prep a family fun time. Ask them what they would like to try – go through recipes online or in cookbooks [like this one](#) or [this one](#) and see what healthy recipes interest them. While many of the recipes call for unhealthy ingredients, it's easy to swap or eliminate those ingredients in most cases (if there are too many, just skip that particular recipe.) My kids and I did this today and it was interesting to see what new recipes they wanted to try and the (mostly) healthy menu plan we were able to put together.

Here are my top 10 tips for eating healthy on Passover:

1. Buy organic potatoes

I know what you're thinking: "A gazillion pounds of organic potatoes will cost me a fortune!" But this isn't the case; organic potatoes are really not much more than conventional ones. The reason to spend a little extra? A 2006 U.S.D.A. test found 81 percent of potatoes tested still contained pesticides after being washed and peeled, and the potato has one of the highest pesticide contents of 43 fruits and vegetables tested, according to the Environmental Working Group. So with all those potatoes being eaten on Passover, it's a much better choice. Thankfully, organic potatoes are still readily available in health food stores such as Greenwise or Whole Foods.

2. Buy organic eggs

Much like potatoes, we typically go through a gazillion eggs on Pesach so it's important that they are as healthy as possible. This means no hormones, antibiotics or genetically modified ingredients are in the chicken feed. This is a lot more difficult than buying organic potatoes this year, at least here in Florida where they only allow 1 dozen eggs per purchase but it's still worth a try. Note that eggs labeled Omega-3 are not the same thing and this causes a lot of confusion among consumers. The Omega-3 label simply means that flax seeds have been added to the feed. To get the most health benefits, organic eggs are the best choice.

3. Use organic spelt matzah instead of wheat

Spelt is nutritionally superior to wheat and easier to digest. While spelt does contain gluten, the gluten content is less, and many people sensitive to wheat find they can tolerate spelt. (Note that spelt is not suitable for

those with celiac disease or those on a gluten-free diet). Even if you aren't sensitive to wheat, another benefit to choosing spelt instead is that it remains unaffected by concepts such as 'agribusiness', 'cross-breeding,' 'hybridization' and 'genetically modified' – words that have come to dominate our modern food supply. What does this mean to you? Less toxic substances and chemicals being consumed, better for your health. It is easy to find Organic Spelt Matzoh at your local grocery store. If you are celiac or cannot tolerate gluten at all, oat matza is a good option, although I personally don't like the taste.

4. Cook, bake and buy products only made with hexane-free grapeseed oil, avocado oil and/or organic coconut oil instead of cottonseed oil

According to most health experts, cottonseed oil is one of the unhealthiest oils ever! Cottonseed oil contains natural toxins because in order to extract oil from cottonseed, these seeds have to be modified genetically. The oil also contains unacceptably high levels of pesticide residues, since cotton is not classified as a food crop and farmers use many agrichemicals when growing it. Additionally, since there is a similarity in the molecular structures of cottonseed and peanut oil, some people who are allergic to peanuts also suffer from the same allergic reactions after consuming cottonseed oil. Interesting, right? Why every single packaged Pesach product contains cottonseed oil in 2020 is a mystery to me. It seems the Kosher brands have a lot of nutrition science to catch up to!

Grapeseed, avocado and coconut oil can all be used for moderate to high heat cooking while organic olive oil is great for salads and lower heat cooking or baking.

5. Bake, don't buy, Pesach cakes and desserts

In addition to saving you lots of money, baking your own cakes for Pesach has many benefits over purchasing ready-made ones. First, you can significantly decrease the amount of sugar in almost every Pesach cake recipe, without affecting the final result; in fact, it actually tastes a lot better! Second, you can use Organic sugar or even coconut sugar which has a lower glycemic index and lower pesticide residue. Third, commercial Pesach cakes are loaded with chemicals and preservatives in order to increase their shelf life, contains food coloring, unnatural flavoring and cottonseed oil. Baking your own allows you to use the healthier oils and eggs mentioned above, eliminates the need for chemicals and gives you the opportunity to incorporate ingredients like organic raw almonds or walnuts for omega 3's to add healthy fatty acids as well as fiber. Choose recipes that have the lowest amounts of potato starch and preferably no matzoh meal/cake meal for the healthiest result.

6. Drink dry red wine at the Seder

Many of my friends will love this one! Red wine has some antioxidant properties as well as bioflavonoids, which help to fight free radicals – the

damaging agents in your body that can lead to heart disease and cancer. What this means is that the cups of wine you consume for the Seder can offer some health benefits so skip the sweet wines which are loaded with sugar.

If you or your children are drinking grape juice at the Seder, use [organic grape juice with no sulfites](#). Sulfites, or sodium/potassium metabisulfite as it is commonly labelled, are a potential food allergen that can cause headache, facial flushing and itching and are found in all wines and grape juice unless it specifies "sulphite-free" on the label. It is more difficult to obtain wine without sulphites, but if you tend to get any of those reactions after drinking wine, you might consider making the switch. That being said, some people get a reaction due to other substances in wine. Since white wine often has a higher sulfite levels than red wines, if you don't react to white wine, then you know that it's something in red wine other than sulfites that is causing the problem.

7. Stick to whole foods

Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables! To switch things up a bit, try making ones you rarely eat during the year along with lots of different types of salads, roasted vegetables, fish, chicken, turkey and lean meats. Don't forget healthy carb options like quinoa and sweet potatoes and drink plenty of water. Simple recipes not only taste delicious, they are healthier and make your life in the kitchen easier!

8. Make your own mayonnaise

I don't know about you but I can't seem to find Pesach mayo that is all natural, let alone that tastes good! They have so many chemicals, along with the dreaded cottonseed oil and preservatives that give it a super weird taste. I started making [my own mayo](#) a few years ago and never looked back. If you haven't tried that yet, I highly recommend it.

9. Skip the dairy

Dairy products are highly inflammatory, likely due to the amount of hormones and antibiotics in them. But even if you use only organic milk it is extremely allergenic and not something I recommend for most people. On the other hand, organic yogurt is well tolerated by most people but impossible to find for Pesach. Almost every brand is loaded with chemicals and preservatives that are not only harmful but also taste pretty terrible. If you will really miss your yogurt, the only brand I have personally found that is made with no added sugar and simple ingredients is Mehadrin plain Greek yogurt. You can always add coconut sugar or organic honey to sweeten along with fresh fruit.

But what about milk? As mentioned earlier, good tasting almond milk is a great option but impossible to get for Pesach. [Making your own almond milk](#) is super easy and delicious. Any [good quality blender](#) and [nut milk bag](#) will do the job and the milk can be stored in mason jars for up to 5 days or frozen in ice cube trays.

10. Check ingredients

If you do want to purchase packaged food items for Pesach, always look at the ingredients and [see this list for what to avoid](#). It may seem like everything you pick up at the store has one or more of these ingredients but you can definitely find more options than have been available in previous years. Don't want to spend time at the grocery store because of Covid-19? I totally get it. In that case look online before heading to the store. You can also check out the Passover highlight on my [Instagram](#) page.

Stay safe, wash your hands, eat healthy and hopefully life will get back to normal real soon! Do you follow any of these healthy guidelines? Let me know in the comments! In the meantime, wishing you all a Chag Kasher V'sameach! ☐
