



What Is Considered “Sharp Foods”

Sharp foods have a unique status in the laws of kashrut. The *Gemara (Chulin 111:a)* brings the example of radishes as being sharp. Early halachic authorities discuss a larger range of sharp foods. The *Maharam (Teshuvot V'Psakim 2:22)* states that onions and garlic are considered sharp foods, while the *Orchot Chaim (60)* rules that fruits that become bitter are included in the sharp-food category. The common factor which determines the status of sharp food is a strong flavor that is difficult to eat, either because it is too spicy, bitter or very salty (see *Bein Yisrael L'amim 22*, footnote 16).

Later halachic authorities bring numerous examples of sharp foods and attempt to categorize which factors determine its status. The *Da'at Kedoshim* and other authorities (*Panim Meiros, Beit Hillel*) rule that the determining factor of a sharp food is if the food is never eaten on its own. Rather, a sharp food is eaten as a mixture or as added flavor to other foods because of its sharp nature. This would include onions, lemons, jalapeno peppers, horseradish,

garlic and other strong spices. This list is universally accepted in halachic status (*Sefer Hakashrut 10:101*). Later *poskim* (see *Da'at Torah YD 96:2*) debate about the status of certain foods in regards to food that is eaten on its own and therefore not considered sharp. Bitter or very tart fruits are eaten on their own regardless of their sharpness. As such, according to the above rule, they would not be considered sharp foods. Nevertheless, certain *poskim (Taz YD 96:9)* hold that one should ideally be stringent even for bitter or very tart fruit. It would seem that certain foods are exceptions to the “eaten alone” rule, especially if they are very strong in flavor (*Bein Yisrael L'amim 22*, footnote 8).

Liquids can also be considered sharp. This includes vinegar, olive oil and lemon juice. Whisky or liqueurs that have high alcohol levels are considered sharp even though they are consumed without any additional food. They are generally consumed in small doses because of their sharpness (*Pri Megadim YD 96:9, Aruch Hashulchan YD 96:13*). Most *poskim* do not consider wine as sharp, since it is normally consumed in the fashion of other beverages (see *Bein Yisrael L'amim 22:7*).

Non-sharp foods that are mixed with sharp foods are considered sharp foods if the flavor is strong. Foods that fall under this category include herring salad, spicy



matbucha salad, and extremely spicy fish. Pickles and pickled olives are not considered sharp since they are normally eaten on their own and their flavor is not exceptionally sharp (*Aruch Hashulchan* 96:13).

The *Rema* mentions in two different places (YD 95:2, 122:2) that food that include sharp ingredients are only considered sharp if those ingredients are the majority. For example, based on the *Rema*, a fish dish with onions and spices is only considered sharp if the onions and spices are the majority. This idea seems quite difficult to understand, since many spicy or bitter dishes are sharp even if they are the minority in the dish. The *Darchoi Teshuva* (95:41) clarifies that it depends on flavor. If as a result of a small amount of spice the flavor is strong, it is considered a sharp food regardless of amount. In short, sharpness is based more on flavor than quantity.

When kashrut questions arise the subject

of sharp foods should always be taken into consideration.

To summarize:

- Common sharp foods include onions, garlic, radishes, vinegar, some olive oil, pickled herring, very spicy *matbucha* and others.
- Extremely bitter fruit is considered sharp, according to some *poskim*.
- Whisky, liqueur and other high alcohol drinks are considered sharp; wine is not.
- According to the *Rema*, sharpness is based on relative quantity. The accepted practice, however, is to assess sharpness based on strength of flavor. ■

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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