



Certified Kosher Ingredients

In past articles, we discussed the ingredient panel used by OU Kosher, which categorizes ingredients into six groups, numbered 1 through 6. The lower the number, the less sensitive the ingredient is in terms of kosher certification. Group 3 represents the majority of kosher ingredients used in the certified industry.

There are products that may be 100% kosher without requiring supervision. However, because they can be derived from non-kosher sources or processed in non-kosher ways, OU Kosher requires supervision for many such ingredients. It's important to note that Group 3 ingredients can vary — in some cases, certain types of products almost never contain problematic ingredients, while in others, non-kosher

sources are quite common.

For example, enzymes, which are derived from living cells, can come from animal sources, yet are more commonly produced from plant-based or microbial sources. Although the latter is more typical, to ensure certainty, OU Kosher requires supervision and a kosher program for the use of enzymes.

There are also ingredients that are very rarely derived from non-kosher sources — grapes, for example, which require tight kosher supervision due to halachic reasons. Although the chance of a kosher concern may seem far-fetched, OU still classifies such ingredients as Group 1, meaning the ingredient is considered innocuous and does not require additional certification for use in kosher products.

There is no universal rule for determining how commonly ingredients are sourced from kosher or non-kosher origins. These realities fluctuate and evolve for a variety of reasons. OU Kosher's Ingredients Department constantly reviews ingredient sources and updates each item's category accordingly.

GROUP THREE OVERVIEW

There are ingredients that are always kosher, regardless of source or processing. Conversely, some ingredients are always problematic. Group 3 focuses on ingredients that require some level of supervision to be considered kosher.

Sometimes, the ingredients themselves may be inherently kosher, but the processes they undergo or the substances they are mixed with may necessitate kosher supervision. Group 3 ingredients can be divided into several key

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categories. While this article won't cover every Group 3 ingredient used in food manufacturing, it will help readers recognize that even simple-looking ingredients may still require kosher certification.

COMMON GROUP THREE INGREDIENTS

- **Acids:**
Acids are typically added to foods to enhance flavor, preserve freshness, or balance the product. They are rarely the main ingredient but have a significant impact on taste and shelf life. For example, acids are essential in soft drinks. Although many acids are not inherently kosher-sensitive, due to their sources and fermentation processes, many acids used as additives are classified as Group 3.
- **Dairy Products:**
Regardless of halachic debates about the modern-day status of milk, many dairy products are by-products of cheese, which has complex kosher concerns. As a result, many (but not all) dairy items and their derivatives are considered Group 3.
- **Thickening Agents and Preservatives:**
These are common in industrial food

production. Examples include oleoresins and glycerides. Because these ingredients may be derived from animal sources, they are also placed in Group 3.

- **Flavors, Flavor Additives, and Colors:**
Flavorings are highly complex in the food industry. Due to the vast number of ingredients and potential animal sources, any flavor, flavor additive, or coloring is automatically categorized as Group 3. ■

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