



Kosher Glycerin

Kosher ingredients form the foundation of kosher certification. Because ingredients today are sourced globally, extracted through various methods, and processed in diverse ways, determining whether an ingredient is kosher-compatible requires extensive expertise. Although ingredients are constantly changing, certain components remain integral to modern food production. Kosher certification agencies continuously research and establish policies through ongoing review of such ingredients. One of the most common and complex of these ingredients is glycerin.

Glycerin (or glycerol) is a widely used and safe food additive that functions as a humectant (moisture retainer), sweetener, thickener, and solvent. It is found in many products, including soft candies, chewing gum, dried fruits, energy bars, frostings, beverages, marshmallows, and sauces. Glycerin helps retain moisture

and prevents sugar from crystallizing. Its use in the food industry is widespread across all continents and has been a staple of large-scale manufacturing for generations.

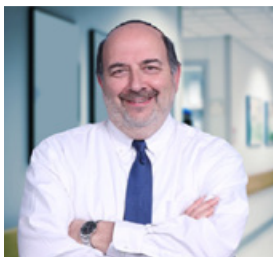
Glycerin is typically derived from oils, which may be either animal-based or vegetable-based. There are two primary methods used to extract glycerin from oils. The first is saponification, commonly used in soap production, in which oils react with lye (sodium or potassium hydroxide). This reaction breaks down triglycerides, producing soap and crude glycerin. The second method is hydrolysis, in which oils are heated with water under high pressure and temperature. This process splits triglycerides into fatty acids and a glycerin-water solution, often referred to as “sweetwater.”

THE KOSHER CONCERN

These production methods are critical when assessing the halachic status of glycerin. Glycerin produced from vegetable oils, in its pure form and manufactured in a facility dedicated exclusively to vegetable glycerin, is permissible for use in kosher products. In fact, much of the kosher-certified glycerin on the market today fits this description.

The primary question arises regarding the status of glycerin produced from animal-based fats and oils. Some *poskim* viewed the saponification process as a *shinui* (a significant

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transformation). The *Sridei Aish* (2:21) and *Tzitz Eliezer* (6:16) write that since glycerin undergoes a chemical change and is transformed into a new substance, it may be considered an *issur she'nishtaneh* (a prohibited substance that has changed form which makes it permissible). There is a halachic concept—discussed more fully in other contexts—that when a prohibited food undergoes a drastic chemical transformation, it may lose its original prohibited status.

However, the *Tzitz Eliezer* applies this leniency only in cases involving a sick person (*Choleh She'ein Bo Sakanah*) when kosher alternatives are unavailable, and the *Sridei Aish* is lenient only when the glycerin is nullified (i.e., present in a ratio of less than 1:60).

It appears that much of this discussion among the *poskim* focused on the first method of glycerin extraction. It should be noted that in earlier times, lye and salts may not have been fully removed from the glycerin, leaving it with a foul taste and resulting in crude glycerin. In contrast, modern food-grade glycerin is highly refined, pure, and has a sweet, pleasant taste. Moreover, the hydrolysis method involves merely heating fats until they separate, followed by filtering and refining. In this process, there is no significant chemical transformation that would constitute a halachic *shinui*.

THE KOSHER CONCLUSION

Although some responsa suggest limited leniencies regarding glycerin, all reputable kosher certification agencies uniformly maintain that glycerin derived from animal-based fats is non-kosher. Furthermore, since glycerin is often an essential component in food

products, many authorities hold that it is not subject to nullification, even when present in minute quantities. Consequently, food products containing animal-based glycerin are considered non-kosher and prohibited for consumption. ■

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