



English Muffins

Our Sages decreed that one should not bake dairy bread—that is, bread made with milk or other dairy ingredients mixed into the dough. Since dairy bread often appears identical to pareve bread, *Chazal* were concerned that it might inadvertently be eaten together with meat.

With the continual development of modern food production, OU Kosher is constantly confronted with new innovations and manufacturing processes. When making halachic determinations, it is essential to understand both the production process and the proper application of halachic principles to contemporary scenarios. This article will examine several OU Kosher rulings regarding dairy baked goods.

MUFFINS

The OU certifies many brands of English muffins that bear an OU-D symbol, while

many others are certified OU-Pareve. Considering the prohibition against producing dairy bread (*Shulchan Aruch* YD 97:1), how can the OU certify English muffins as dairy?

As discussed in previous articles, the concern underlying the prohibition of dairy or meat bread is that bread is commonly eaten as part of a meal. Consequently, a person may inadvertently eat dairy bread with meat, or meat bread with dairy. However, this concern applies primarily to “generic” bread and not necessarily to products that possess a distinctive form or identity. When a baked item is viewed as unique or specialized, consumers are more likely to recognize it as different from ordinary bread and exercise caution regarding how it is consumed.

The critical question, therefore, is not whether a product is typically made pareve, but whether consumers perceive it as ordinary bread or as a distinct food item. If it is regarded as just another type of bread, it should generally be pareve. If it is viewed as a unique product, there may be room to permit it even when dairy or meat ingredients are present.

For this reason, dairy bagels would generally not be permitted. Although bagels have a distinctive shape, they are widely regarded as a standard bread product and are commonly eaten with either meat or dairy. English muffins, however, developed differently. Thomas’ English Muffins were the first English muffins encountered by most kosher consumers and, at the time, they were dairy. As a result, English muffins never became fully associated with ordinary bread in the same way that

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bagels did. Rather, they retained their identity as a specialty product that consumers recognized as potentially dairy and therefore unsuitable for consumption with meat.

Even though many pareve English muffins are available today, one could argue that consumers still view English muffins as a distinct category of baked goods rather than as ordinary bread. Consequently, people are less likely to assume that an English muffin is automatically pareve and suitable for consumption with meat. Under such analysis English muffins are not part of the decree not to produce or consume dairy bread.

However, Rabbi Hershel Schachter, one of OU Kosher's *poskim*, questioned this reasoning. He noted that circumstances have changed significantly. While English muffins may once have been almost exclusively dairy, there are now numerous pareve varieties on the market. Since consumers can no longer assume that English muffins are dairy, there may be concern that certifying dairy English muffins could create the very confusion that the decree of dairy bread was intended to prevent.

Further investigation revealed that the milk content in these products is halachically nullified within the dough (less than 1/60 of the any batch). In previous articles, we discussed whether it is permissible to intentionally add a small amount of milk that will subsequently become *batel* (nullified). Some authorities explicitly prohibit this practice, while others permit it without reservation.

Rabbi Schachter adopts an intermediate position. He maintains that while there is no

concern regarding the dairy content itself, OU Kosher should nevertheless continue labeling the product as OU-D. In his view, despite the milk being *batel*, the product should not be consumed with meat. Although English muffins are not commonly eaten as part of a meat meal, the possibility still exists, and the designation serves as an important safeguard.

Rabbi Schachter further noted that if the manufacturers revert to a recipe containing a more substantial amount of milk certification must be removed since English Muffins would now qualify as dairy bread par excellence and be part of the rabbinic decree.

In short, OU Kosher certifies Thomas English Muffins under the symbol OU-D (dairy) although the dairy substance in the muffins is certainly nullified. Under this policy they should not be eaten together with meat.

ADDING DAIRY AFTER BAKING

Several years ago, another interesting question was presented to OU Kosher. A company produced French bread using entirely pareve ingredients. After the bread was baked, butter was injected into the center of the loaf. Does this violate the prohibition against dairy bread? Furthermore, since the bread is sold in sealed packaging, must it bear an OU-D designation?

Although the *Gemara* discusses bread that was kneaded with milk, which may imply that the prohibition applies only when dairy ingredients are incorporated into the dough before baking, the *Chavot Da'at* (YD 97:6) rules that even if milk spills onto bread after baking, the

bread may still be prohibited.

However, the *Ben Ish Chai* (Responsa *Rav Pe'alim* 1:11) appears to take a different approach. He understands that such a case is not included in the formal decree of dairy bread. Rather, it falls under a separate concern that consumers might make a mistake. If an effective *heker* (identifying marker or reminder) is present, the concern can be addressed.

Based on this reasoning, Rabbi Schachter ruled that OU Kosher may certify such bread, provided that the packaging clearly indicates its dairy status. The OU-D symbol serves as a sufficient *heker*, alerting consumers that the product contains dairy and should not be eaten together with meat. ■

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