

A Pesach Guide for Those with Food Allergies and Sensitivities

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The Challenge of the Orthodox Diet

In 2011, Rabbi Reuven Spolter wrote a powerful piece in which he called upon the Orthodox Jewish community to take physical health and physical well-being more seriously. In his words:

Our community rightly protects the value of life. We will fight for the right to cling to every last second of life, devoted to the notion that every moment is precious and holy. And yet, at the very same time, under the banner of *frumkeit*, we have adopted a lifestyle that is literally going to cut years and perhaps decades from our lives.¹

The Importance of Health

The Torah states, “Take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously” (*Devarim* 4:9) and “Be very careful with your lives” (*Devarim* 4:15). These two verses are interpreted by the Gemara (*Berachos* 32b) as admonishments to take care of our physical well-being.

Another example of the emphasis on physical well-being can be seen in the Talmudic concept referred to as “*chamirah sakanta mi’isurah*,” physical danger is treated more seriously in halachah than ritual prohibition (*Chullin* 10a).

One of the strongest statements advocating health in the literature is that of the Rambam:

Since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of G-d—for one cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator, if he is ill—therefore, he must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is healthful and helps the body become stronger.²

¹ Rabbi Reuven Spolter, “Is Orthodoxy Unhealthy?” *Jewish Action* (Spring 2011).

² *De’os* 4:1. Translation adapted from Rabbi Eliyahu Touger’s *Mishneh Torah* (Moznaim).

Conflicting Values

All things being equal, most people would agree that physical well-being is important. The more challenging issue is what if the value of health comes into conflict with another central value of Judaism—such as mitzvah observance?

For example, what if one is doing a mitzvah which causes physically negative results? Can one argue that G-d will protect that person from harm? Some of us may have heard someone say (or say to ourselves), “I can eat unhealthily. It is *oneg Shabbos* (enjoyment on Shabbos)!” Or “Isn’t it a mitzvah to eat matzah on Pesach? My health cannot stand in the way of an explicit commandment in the Torah.” These arguments might even be supported by a verse in *Kobeles* (8:5), “One who observes mitzvos will not suffer from a dangerous situation.” We can never be harmed by a mitzvah, so why the concern?

In response to this kind of argumentation, Dovid Lichtenstein, author and host of the well-known podcast, “Halacha Headlines,” cites a passage by Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Halperin that supports the halachic imperative of maintaining physical health even when performing a mitzvah.³ In the case of a circumcision being done on Shabbos, Rashi comments that even though, in general, a circumcision in its proper time is performed on Shabbos, if there is an established *chazakah* that the child would be put at risk of death after being circumcised, we do not perform the circumcision on Shabbos.⁴ Based on this Rashi, R. Halperin argues that whenever one is absolved of a mitzvah due to the risk posed to one’s health, there is no value whatsoever in performing the mitzvah. In fact, that person actually violates halachah by exposing himself/herself unnecessarily to danger.⁵

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch argues along similar lines. In response to a case of a person whose doctors forbade him from eating matzah or *maror* on Pesach because of the risk of certain danger to his health, he argues

³ Dovid Lichtenstein, *Headlines*, Vol. 2 (Orthodox Union Press, 2017), 264–265.

⁴ Rashi, *Yevamos* 64b, s.v. “*Issura VeSakanta*.”

⁵ *Shu”t Oneg Yom Tov*, no. 41. However, see *Shu”t Minchas Asher*, Vol. 3, no. 42, who raises a number of issues with using circumcision as precedent as it may be an exceptional case for a variety of reasons.

that there is no fulfillment of the mitzvah, even if he were to eat the matzah or *maror*.⁶ According to R. Sternbuch, even if the risk is only a possibility, it is forbidden to eat the matzah or *maror*.⁷

The Challenge of the Pesach Diet

Notwithstanding the above sources, maintaining physical health and a balanced and wholesome diet can be difficult. Three weekly Shabbos meals, *kiddushim*, and the occasional *shalom zachar* are a constant challenge to a healthy relationship with food all year round. Perhaps, even more foreboding for many with food allergies or sensitivities, is Pesach. On this holiday, more than any other time on the Jewish calendar, our relationship with food can get out of hand. Even for those who do not have a restrictive diet per se, on Pesach, many people abandon their normal approach to food. An absurd amount of matzah, potato starch, and the staple that no good kosher-for-Pesach item can go without—cottonseed oil—are consumed. But this does not need to remain the status quo.

My father, who is a wonderful cook on Pesach as well as during the rest of the year, offered sound advice for Pesach consumers who are concerned (and rightly so) about their diet. He has a very simple approach to the Pesach menu, “If we would not eat it the rest of the year, we should not eat it on Pesach.”

Keeping with the “Lesher approach” to the Pesach diet, in this article, I will endeavor to provide a clear guide for those with food allergies and sensitivities who are attempting to create a balanced diet while at the same time seeking to fulfill all the mitzvos of Pesach in the ideal manner. Even those without specific food restrictions may be surprised at what the actual halachic requirements are and would gain much from more healthy moderation.

⁶ R. Moshe Sternbuch, *Teshuvas VeHanhagos* 2:241.

⁷ Ibid. R. Sternbuch notes that some righteous individuals have placed themselves in a low level of danger to fulfill *mitzvos*. To account for this, he argues, a distinction needs to be made between minimal risk and high risk. The issue becomes less clear when the risk is less serious. If, for example, one is advised against eating gluten, but the effects on one’s health are relatively minimal, an argument can be made that one can choose to eat matzah, even contrary to medical advice. See R. Kalman Laufer, “Celiac Disease, Matzah and Patient Autonomy,” *YU Pesach To-Go* 5783, p. 25. R. Laufer notes that the case of someone suffering from celiac disease choosing to eat matzah against medical advice has implications about how much autonomy halachah grants a patient. If one is in such a scenario, one should seek the guidance of one’s *rav* and medical professional.

Limitations of This Guide

A disclaimer must be made at the outset. The purpose of this guide is not to be used as a replacement for asking questions to your local rabbi or *mara d'asra*. Its purpose is to summarize the halachic literature and allow for those with allergies and food-sensitivities to ask their *rav* more informed questions. Seeking personal halachic guidance from a *rav* who understands the particulars of the situation is a critical part of the halachic decision-making process. Often, a single differentiating factor can change the halachah considerably.

Matzah: How Much?

According to normative halachah, there are three times one should eat matzah during the Seder: *Motzi Matzah*, *Korech* and *Tzafun (Afikomen)*. Ideally, to fulfill all of one's obligations according to all opinions, one should eat two *kezeisim* (olive-sized amount) for *Motzi Matzah*, one *kezayis* for *Korech*, and two more *kezeisim* for *Afikomen*, which makes for a total of five *kezeisim*.

The reason for this is that *Shulchan Aruch* writes that for *Motzi Matzah* one should eat one *kezayis* from the broken matzah and one *kezayis* from the whole matzah.⁸ *Mishnah Berurah* rules that one *kezayis* is enough for *Korech*.⁹ For *Afikomen*, although *Shulchan Aruch* is of the opinion that one can eat one *kezayis*,¹⁰ *Rema* rules that it is preferable to have two *kezeisim*.¹¹ This brings us to a total of five *kezeisim*.

Can One Eat Less?

If one has difficulty eating five *kezeisim*, is there room for leniency? First of all, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and others rule that for *Motzi Matzah*, if the matzos of the head of the household do not total two *kezeisim* for each person, one fulfills one's mitzvah by eating a bit from the whole matzah and one other *kezayis*.¹² Secondly, one can have only one *kezayis* for *Afikomen* and rely on *Shulchan Aruch*. This would be a total of about three *kezeisim*.

⁸ *Orach Chaim* 475:1.

⁹ *Orach Chaim* 475:16.

¹⁰ *Orach Chaim* 477:1.

¹¹ *Darkei Moshe* 477:1 citing *Maharil Magen Avraham* (477:1) explains that one is in commemoration of the *korban pesach* and one is for the matzah eaten with it.

¹² *Halichos Shlomo* 9:40. See https://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Required_Amount_of_Matzah_and_Wine_for_the_Seder footnote 23
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What if that is still too much for a person to handle? What is the bare minimum? *Magen Avraham* writes that if one is ill, and cannot eat more than one *kezayis*, one should eat one's meal without saying *HaMotzi*, and then afterwards make *HaMotzi* and *Al Achilas Matzah* and then eat the one *kezayis* of matzah. This way, one fulfills *Motzi Matzah* and *Afikomen*.¹³ Rabbi Asher Weiss, responding to a query from someone with celiac disease, rules that if one cannot have more than one *kezayis* of matzah, one should follow this *Magen Avraham*.¹⁴

How Much Is a *Kezayis*?

How much is an olive-sized amount of matzah?¹⁵ Below are some of the most commonly cited views regarding the *shiur* (halachically-required amount) of a *kezayis* in the contemporary *poskim*. Chazon Ish is cited as holding a *kezayis* is 33.3 cubic centimeters (henceforth: cc),¹⁶ whereas R. Avraham Chaim Noe holds it is 27 cc.¹⁷ Rabbi Moshe Feinstein is cited as holding that a *kezayis* is 31 cc.¹⁸ Rabbi Mordechai Willig is more lenient.

¹³ *Orach Chaim* 482:1.

¹⁴ *Shu"t Minchas Asher* 3:43:3.

¹⁵ For more on the history and halachos of the *kezayis* see Rabbi Chaim P. Beinish, *Middos V'Shiurei Torah* (Bnei Brak, 2000) 521–532; Rabbi Yisroel Pinchos Bodner, *Halachos of K'zayis* (Feldheim, 2001); Rabbi Natan Slifkin, “The Evolution of the Olive: The Halachic History of the Expanding Kezayis,” *Zootorah.com* (2010).

¹⁶ Rabbi Hadar Yehuda Margolin, “*Birur Shitas HaChazon Ish b'Shiur Kezayis*,” *Moriah* 219–220 (19:3–4, 5753), p. 99–103, who cites some charts that list Chazon Ish’s opinion requiring 33cc for a *kezayis*, whereas other charts list his opinion is 50cc. Among other considerations, Chazon Ish’s opinion is based on the opinion of Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, who argues that our eggs are half the size of the eggs that existed in Talmudic times that were used to determine the size of the *kezayis*. See R. Yechezkel Landau, *Tzelach, Pesachim* 116b and Chazon Ish, *Kuntres Shiurim, Orach Chaim* 39:6. However, R. Margolin argues convincingly that Chazon Ish holds a *kezayis* is fundamentally no more than 17cc. The other amounts cited in the name of Chazon Ish are stringencies.

¹⁷ In *Shiurei Torah* 3:11, p. 191 (5707) he ruled 28.8cc, however in his later work *Shiurei Tzion* (5709), p. 70, he wrote 27. Also, see Rabbi Alexander Aryeh Mandelbaum, *VeZos HaBerachah, Birur Halachah* 1, p. 221.

¹⁸ R. Mandelbaum 221 citing Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, *Haggadas Kol Dodi*. In the revised edition of “Do It Right on Pesach Night: What? When? How Much?” published by Beth Medrash L’Torah V’Horoah (the Kollel located at Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem [MTJ] 145 East Broadway, New York, NY), reprinted from

He rules that a *kezayis* is 22.5 cc. For machine matzah it is less than $\frac{2}{5}$ of a matzah and for hand matzah it is somewhat less than $\frac{1}{5}$ of an average hand matzah.¹⁹

R. Willig writes:

In cases of illness, one may consider eating only a smaller *shiur*, either one third of an egg in its shell (about 17 cubic centimeters) or the size of today's olives (no more than 7.5 cubic centimeters).²⁰

Similarly, in this same responsum cited above, R. Asher Weiss states:

עוד יש לו לדעת שטעיקר הדין יכול להקל בשיעור כזית דאף השיעורים הקטנים של הגרא"ח נאה יש בהם חומרא ובשעה"ד כבנ"ד יכול לסמוק לשיעור כזית הוא כזית ביןוני בזמנינו.

The person in question [with celiac disease] should also be aware that as a matter of strict law, one can be lenient regarding the size of a *kezayis*, as even the measurements of R. Chaim Noe are somewhat stringent. [Because] in a difficult situation such as this, one can rely on the size of an olive being medium in our times.²¹

Although he doesn't give an exact amount, R. Weiss apparently holds that one who suffers from celiac disease can rely on a *shiur* even smaller than R. Noe's 27 cc.²²

As noted above, between four and five *kezeisim* is the ideal amount required to be eaten at the Seder with the minimum being one *kezayis*. So

Olomeinu, Our World (Torah Umesorah, 1974) it cites R. Moshe Feinstein's position as a piece of matzah measuring at least 7 inches by 6 1/4 inches. I thank Rabbi Neil Cohen for this document.

¹⁹ Rabbi Mordechai Willig, "How Much Matza Do You Need to Eat?" *YU Pesach To-Go* 5771, p. 58–61 and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, "The *Shiurim* of Seder Night," *YUTorah.org* (April 6, 2008) (audio recording, min. 1–10).

I recall my family's *rav*, Rabbi Ron Yitzchok Eisenman, the Rav of Congregation Ahavas Israel of Passaic, New Jersey, giving the size of a credit card as the example of how much a *kezayis* of matzah is required to be eaten on Seder night.

²⁰ R. Willig, "How Much Matza?" Using a typical olive as a *kezayis* is a view held by some of the *Geonim*. See R. Beinish, *Middos V'Shiurei Torah* 522–523. More recently, it is also a view cited in the name of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin. See R. Margolin 100, no. 6 and *Ma'aseh Rav*, p. 218, 337–338 citing *Kebillos Yaakov Pesachim* 43.

²¹ *Shu"t Minchas Asher* 3:43:3. Translation is my own.

²² R. Weiss' view seems to align with the opinion of R. Chaim Volozhin cited above that one may rely on the size of the average modern olive. Since R. Weiss does not give an exact amount, for simplicity's sake, I will group R. Willig and R. Weiss together as one opinion as they both require less than R. Chaim Noe.

according to R. Willig and R. Weiss, the ideal amount to eat is about two machine-made matzos and the minimal amount is $2/5$ of a matzah. For hand-made matzah, the ideal amount is about one matzah, and the minimal amount is $1/5$ of a matzah.²³

Summary of Opinions Regarding the Size of a *Kezayis*:

Opinion	<i>Kezayis</i> in cubic centimeters (cc)	Matzah equivalent per <i>kezayis</i> (approx.) for machine-made matzah and for hand-made matzah
R. Mordechai Willig / R. Asher Weiss	22.5 (7.5 in cases of illness)	Machine: $2/5$ of a matzah Hand: $1/5$ of a matzah (In cases of illness: Machine: $1/4$ of a matzah Hand: $1/8$ of a matzah)
R. Chaim Noe	27	Machine: $1/2$ of a matzah ²⁴ Hand: slightly more than $1/5$ of a matzah ²⁵
R. Moshe Feinstein	31	Machine: more than $1/2$ of a matzah Hand: more than $2/5$ of a matzah ²⁶
Chazon Ish	33.3 (fundamentally 17)	Machine: $4/5$ of a matzah ²⁷ Hand: $1/3$ of a matzah ²⁸

²³ According to R. Bodner, to fulfill one's obligation according to R. Moshe Feinstein, one must eat minimally $2/5$ of a standard machine matzah. For hand matzah, he differentiates between thicknesses. For the thickest hand matzah, a third would suffice, whereas the thinnest kind would require more than half a matzah. See R. Bodner, p. 91–93.

²⁴ Rabbi Yaakov Hirschman, “*Shiurei Matzah U'Maror V'Arba Kosos*,” published by Kollel Toronto Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies and approved by Rabbi Shlomo Miller. I thank Rabbi Neil Cohen for this source.

²⁵ Ibid. R. Hirschman records $1/5$ of a hand-made matzah for R. Chaim Noe's opinion. But based on the cubic centimeter amounts and average volume of hand-made matzos, I estimated 27 cc to be slightly more than $1/5$ of a hand-made matzah.

²⁶ As noted above, “Do It Right on Pesach Night” states the *shiur* is 7 inches by 6 1/4 inches.

²⁷ “*Shiurei Matzah U'Maror V'Arba Kosos*.”

²⁸ Ibid.

R. Willig adds that if one eats more matzah than is required, one continues to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah.²⁹ Therefore, all things being equal, a healthy person should eat more matzah than the minimum *shiur*, and need not be so exacting about the amount.

Gluten-Free Matzah³⁰

If one is allergic to wheat or spelt and cannot eat even one *kezayis* of regular matzah, what are one's options? About thirty years ago, Rabbi Ephraim Kestenbaum of London began developing gluten-free oat matzah, so that those suffering from celiac disease and other allergies to wheat could fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah on Seder night.³¹ Today, gluten-free oat matzah can be found in many kosher-for-Pesach stores. Can someone who suffers from celiac disease use these matzos? What about someone who is gluten sensitive but not acutely allergic?

Are Oats One of the Five Grains?

For a grain to be used for matzah it must be one of the five grains listed in the Mishnah in *Pesachim* (2:5). Are oats one of the five grains?

The Mishnah lists the grains with which one may fulfill one's obligation to eat matzah on Pesach: *chitim* (wheat), *siorim* (barley), *kusmin* (spelt), *shifon* (rye), and *shibolei shual*.

The definition of *shibolei shual* is the subject of debate. Rashi³² as well as Rabbeinu Gershom³³ hold *shibolei shual* is oats. However, Rambam³⁴ and Rabbi Nossen, Av Ha-Yeshivah,³⁵ hold it is actually a different species of barley, known as wild barley or two-rowed barley. *Aruch* quotes one opinion that *shibolei shual* is rye.³⁶

²⁹ Ibid. According to some, this is actually a Biblical mitzvah.

³⁰ My thanks to my friend Rabbi Noach Goldstein who provided me with many of the sources on gluten-free matzah.

³¹ Rabbi Dovid Cohen, "Celiac: A Guide to Mitzvah Observance," *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, Vol. LIX (Spring 2010), 20.

³² *Pesachim* 35a s.v. *shibolei shual*.

³³ *Menachos* 70b, s.v. *shibolei shual*.

³⁴ Rambam, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, *Kilayim* 1:1.

³⁵ Rabbi Nossen Av HaYeshivah, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, *Kilayim* 1:1.

³⁶ *Ha-Aruch Al Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Kilayim*, *halachah* 1. According to this view, *shifon* must be a different kind of grain.

Traditionally, most *poskim* seem to assume, like the school of Rashi, that *shibolei shual* is oats. However, more recently, Professor Yehuda Feliks, an Israeli botanist, argued that this is incorrect. Oats did not grow in Eretz Yisrael at the time of the Mishnah. Furthermore, he cited other indications that oats could not possibly be one of the five grains discussed in the Mishnah. According to Dr. Feliks, oats cannot be used for matzah, and the other halachos of the five grains (*challah*, *berachos*, *chametz*) do not apply to them.³⁷ Rabbi Dovid Cohen notes that Dr. Feliks' position was widely rejected by most contemporary *poskim*, based on the age-old tradition that *shibolei shual* is oats.³⁸ However, R. Hershel Schachter³⁹ and R. Mordechai Willig are concerned about relying on gluten-free oat matzah.⁴⁰ Accordingly, if one cannot have even 7.5 cc of wheat, according to most *poskim*, using gluten-free oat matzah is recommended. According to R. Schachter and R. Willig, if one needs to use oat matzah, one should listen to someone's else's *berachos* on wheat matzah and answer amen.⁴¹

³⁷ Yehuda Feliks, *HaTzomeach Veba'Chai B'Mishnah*, p. 155.

³⁸ R. Cohen, "Celiac: A Guide," 7n5. However, R. Cohen does concede that "his position, that oats, which are relatively gluten-free, are not one of the five grains, would seem to dovetail with those who suggest that the presence of significant amounts of gluten is what differentiates the five grains from rice, corn, and other 'grains.'"

³⁹ R. Hershel Schachter, "Laws and Customs of Pesach (April 7, 2011)," *YUTorah.org* (audio recording, min. 68–71).

⁴⁰ R. Mordechai Willig, "Shiur and Question-and-Answer Session" (April 11, 2019). Rabbi Yitzhak Abadi (*Ohr Yitzhak* 1:60) is also of the opinion that oats are not one of the five grains. Interestingly, Rabbi Yosef Ephrati, "Zohi *Shibolei Shual*," *Mesorah* 13 (Orthodox Union, 1997), 70–71, reports that he took part in a number of experiments that determined that oats can become *chametz* (as the five grains are supposed to, see *Pesachim* 35a) and do not become rancid (as other grains are supposed to). R. Willig (April 11, 2019) addressing R. Efrati's findings that seem to contradict Dr. Feliks' position, argued that oats naturally do have some wheat in their stock because of cross pollination. Therefore, he holds that oats have been classified as one of the five grains historically. Therefore, typical oats can ferment because of their wheat content. However, R. Willig was unsure if one can fulfill one's obligation of matzah with 100% pure oats, devoid of any cross-pollination. He did concede that "in a pinch" one can follow *poskim* who allow pure non-gluten oat matzah to be used. For more see Rabbi Asher Bush, "Gluten Intolerance, Wheat Allergies and Mitzvos, I and II," *TorahMusings.com* (February 6 and 10, 2014) and "Motzei Matzah, footnote 20," *Halachipedia.com*.

⁴¹ R. Hershel Schachter, "Laws and Customs of Pesach" and personal conversation with R. Mordechai Willig (April 2019).

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Even if one is not suffering from celiac disease or a different acute dietary illness, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common issue for many and can pose a formidable challenge for the Pesach diet. Tamar Feldman, a registered functional dietitian, recommends whole-wheat matzah for the additional fiber.⁴² To counteract some of matzah's impact on the gut, she also suggests that those suffering from IBS drink twice their usual amount of water over the first few days of Pesach.⁴³ In addition to this advice, ask your *rav* if you can utilize the smaller *shiurim* listed above to alleviate some of the indigestion that can occur from excess matzah consumption.

The Four Cups of Wine

The Gemara in *Pesachim* (99b) notes the requirement to drink four cups of wine on Seder night. The Gemara (108b) also notes the requirement on Pesach to express “*cheirus*,” freedom, in connection with the drinking of the four cups of wine. Rashbam explains that the beverage should be “*chashuv*,” a significant or dignified drink.⁴⁴ Because of this, halachically, wine is generally the optimal choice for the four cups.

Is Wine Required?

What if someone has a sulfite allergy or has issues drinking alcoholic beverages? Can one use grape juice for the four cups?

⁴² It should be noted that although Rema writes in his gloss to *Shulkhan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 453:1) that the custom is to use wheat; the other 4 grains (as well as whole wheat) are certainly kosher to be used for matzah at the Pesach Seder. See *Mishnah Berurah* (ad loc.).

⁴³ Shira Isenberg, “Of Food and Freedom: Navigating Pesach with Food-Related Conditions” (OUKosher.com). For those suffering from IBS, many nutritionists recommend a diet low in FODMAP foods, or foods which are short-chain carbohydrates (sugars) that the small intestine absorbs poorly. Recommended foods include eggs, meat, certain cheeses such as brie, camembert, cheddar and feta, grains like rice (for Pesach if of Sephardic descent), quinoa and oats, vegetables like eggplant, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers and zucchini, and fruits such as grapes, oranges, strawberries, blueberries and pineapple. See Hazel Galon Veloso, M.D., “FODMAP Diet: What You Need to Know,” hopkinsmedicine.org.

⁴⁴ Rashbam, *Pesachim* 108b, s.v. *yedei cheirus*.

The Gemara in *Nedarim* (49b) states that Rabbi Yehudah said about himself, “[After drinking the four cups of wine at the Seder] I must bind my temples from Pesach until *Shavuos* [to alleviate my headache].”

Accordingly, *Shulchan Aruch* rules that if wine gives one a headache or is harmful to one’s health, one should nonetheless still use wine.⁴⁵ However, *Mishnah Berurah* rules that this only applies if it gives one a headache, but not if it makes one sick in bed.⁴⁶

Can One Use Grape Juice?

Some *poskim* rule that grape juice is not suitable for the four cups.⁴⁷ However, many others allow the use of grape juice.⁴⁸ In fact, according to R. Soloveitchik, even if one merely prefers grape juice over wine, one *should* use grape juice.⁴⁹

Chamar Medinah

If one cannot drink wine or grape juice, one should use *chamar medinah*, a respectable beverage of one’s country.⁵⁰ This category normally includes beer⁵¹ or cognac but not soda, lemonade, or water. *Shulchan Aruch* holds that coffee, tea, or orange juice cannot be used as *chamar medinah*. However, according to *Rema* and *Mishnah Berurah*, they could be used, whereas milk or oil may not be used.⁵² R. Mordechai Willig rules that if wine or grape juice makes a person so sick that he becomes bedridden—and that

⁴⁵ *Orach Chaim* 472:10.

⁴⁶ 472:35.

⁴⁷ Rabbi Shimon D. Eider in the name of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that one does not fulfill one’s obligation of *cheirus* (expressing freedom) with grape juice. However, R. Eider himself concludes that if one is unable to have wine, one should have grape juice. See his *Halachos of Pesach* (Feldheim, 1998), 222. Also, see Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, *Mikraei Kodesh*, *Pesach* 2:35, p. 152, who argues grape juice is certainly not ideal for the Pesach Seder. However, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch (*Teshuvas V’Hanhagos* 2:243) writes that Chazon Ish, Brisker Rav, and other *gedolim* used grape juice at the end of their lives when they were unable to drink wine.

⁴⁸ R. Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 185.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Orach Chaim* 483:1.

⁵¹ Although beer is considered *chamar medinah*, it cannot be used on Pesach because it is *chametz*.

⁵² Ibid.

person cannot have *chamar medinah* either—he is exempt from drinking the four cups.⁵³

How Much Does One Need to Drink?

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 108b) states that one needs to drink a *revi'is* of wine for each cup. This is codified by *Shulchan Aruch*.⁵⁴ If this is difficult, one can fulfill one's obligation by drinking the majority of a *revi'is* for each cup. Some rule that one must drink the majority of the cup, even if that means consuming much more than one *revi'is*.⁵⁵ However, *Mishnah Berurah* states that the halachah follows the other view and only a *revi'is* is required.⁵⁶

How Much Is a *Revi'is*?

Below are some of the most commonly cited views regarding *shiurim* (halachically required amounts) in the contemporary *poskim*. R. Avraham Chaim Noe rules that a *revi'is* is about 2.9 ounces (86 cc).⁵⁷ The Chafetz Chaim holds 3.8 oz.⁵⁸ R. Moshe Feinstein holds 3.3 fl oz (98cc).⁵⁹ The

⁵³ Personal conversation in April 2019.

⁵⁴ *Orach Chaim* 472:9.

⁵⁵ Ramban quoted by *Orchos Chaim*, *Leil Pesach*, no. 6, cited by the *Beis Yosef*, *Orach Chaim* 472:9.

⁵⁶ *Mishnah Berurah* 472:33. *Mishnah Berurah* adds that if one does not intend on drinking a lot, ideally they should use a smaller cup to follow the more stringent view and be able to drink the majority of the cup.

⁵⁷ R. Avraham Chaim Noe writes in *Shiurei Torah* 3:6, p. 176–177 and in *Shiurei Tzizyon*, p. 69 no. 6 that a *revi'is* is 86 grams (cc) which is about 2.9 fluid ounces.

⁵⁸ See *Biur Halachah*, *Orach Chaim* 271:13 s.v. *rovo shel revi'is* who writes one should use the volume of two eggs. See Star-K Staff, “Pesach *Shiurim* for Matzah and Wine — For Healthy Individuals and for Diabetic / Those With Food Allergies,” adapted from Nechama Cohen, “Passover/Pesach Guide for Jewish Diabetes,” Jewish Diabetes Association (updated April 2022), Star-K.org and Rabbi Dovid Heber, “The Guide to Halachic Food Measurements,” Star-K.org (updated April 2022) who rule that this equals 3.8 oz. This amount is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Moshe Heinemann.

⁵⁹ Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, *Kol Dodi Haggadah*, 5730, p. 4. However, “Do It Right on Pesach Night” cites R. Moshe Feinstein’s position as 2.9 oz.

Chazon Ish rules the amount is 5.1 (150 cc).⁶⁰ R. Willig holds 2.5 oz. suffices. Moreover, according to R. Willig, minimally, all you need is the majority of 2.5 ounces which is 1.26 ounces or about 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ ounces.⁶¹

Summary of Opinions Regarding the Amount of a *Revi'iis*

Opinion	<i>Revi'iis</i> in Ounces (oz.)
R. Mordechai Willig	2.5 oz.
R. Chaim Noe	2.9 oz.
R. Moshe Feinstein	3.3 oz.
Chafetz Chaim (As calculated by R. Moshe Heinemann)	3.8 oz.
Chazon Ish	5.1 oz.

Can One Water Down the Wine or Grape Juice?

R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was particularly concerned about adding water to grape juice.⁶² However, R. Willig⁶³ and R. Moshe Heinemann are lenient and allow for dilution.⁶⁴ R. Heinemann holds that one may dilute wine with grape juice or water down to the point where the wine will be 4% alcohol.⁶⁵ You can dilute wine with up to $\frac{2}{3}$ water and $\frac{1}{3}$ wine as long as you still have 4% alcohol.⁶⁶

The diluted beverage should contain at least 4% alcohol to fulfill the obligation of drinking wine at the Seder. If necessary, one may make a mixture of 2/3 water and 1/3 wine (66% water and 34% wine) as long as

⁶⁰ Rabbi Yaakov Kanievsky, *Shiurin Shel Torah*, p. 65 and R. Shimon Eider, *Halachos of Pesach* 229.

⁶¹ Rabbi Mordechai Willig, “The *Shiurim* of Seder Night” (audio recording, min. 1–15) and personal conversation (April 2019). In R. Willig’s words, “You need G.M.G, *Gornisht mit Gornisht* (less than nothing).”

⁶² *Shu”t Minchas Shlomo* no. 4.

⁶³ Personal conversation (April 2019).

⁶⁴ Star-K Staff, “Pesach *Shiurim* for Matzah and Wine.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the diluted amount still contains 4% alcohol. Otherwise, there is a chance that it may no longer be considered wine for the Seder.⁶⁷

The following chart illustrates how much wine to drink according to the Star-K and R. Willig:

Cup	Amount you drink	Amount of wine after dilution
Each cup	Star-K: 1.9 oz. R. Willig: 1.25 oz.	Star-K: 0.7 oz. R. Willig: 0.4 oz.
Total for four cups	Star-K: 7.6 oz. R. Willig: 5 oz.	Star-K: 2.8 oz. R. Willig: 1.6 oz.

According to the Star-K, if one is unable to drink pure grape juice due to medical reasons (and cannot drink any percentage of wine), one may dilute regular grape juice. When mixing grape juice with water, it is best to make at least 51% of the mixture regular grape juice (i.e., the other 49% is water). Star-K further states that “light grape juice” may not be diluted by the consumer (if there is a necessity, check with the certifying agency of the product).

Preparing for the Seder

The Star-K emphasizes the need for those with allergies and dietary restrictions to properly prepare for the Seder. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail. Having everything ready ahead of time makes it much less likely for dietary issues to arise.⁶⁸

Below is a useful checklist I have adapted from the Star-K guide:

- Discuss with your rabbi and doctor the amount of matzah, wine, etc. necessary to fulfill the mitzvah given your specific medical condition or dietary challenge.
- Prepare these measurements before Yom Tov with a separate labeled bottle for your mixture.
- Select the wine of your choice and check the carb and alcohol content.
- Prepare the right size cup (often it can be smaller than you think).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

- Try to arrive at an accurate measurement for matzah before Yom Tov (i.e., on or before Erev Pesach).
- Prepare your choice of glucose for treating hypoglycemia.
- Review your chart and details with your health care team.
- Prepare all medical supplies, medications, and equipment for Yom Tov and Shabbos.

It is my belief that those with restrictive diets and/or those with allergies need not suffer through their Pesach Seder. Using the above guidelines with proper planning and forethought, having a healthy, as well as halachically ideal, Pesach Seder is certainly attainable. This applies to the rest of Yom Tov as well. Even for healthy individuals, the Pesach diet does not have to be restricted to matzah, meat, potato starch, and lots of eggs.⁶⁹ If you would not eat something the rest of the year, why is it acceptable to eat it on Pesach? Both the body and the soul are needed in the service of Hashem. We must take care of both of them. Rambam wrote, “We cannot truly know Hashem if we are sick.” If our wellness and physical needs are not met, we cannot begin to have the mental and emotional bandwidth to enjoy ourselves at the Seder. May we all merit to be healthy, both physically and spiritually, and to truly know and experience Hashem and His mitzvos—on Pesach and all year round. **❀**

⁶⁹ The Jewish Diabetes Association has published a cookbook titled, *EnLITEned Kosher Cooking*. See jewishdiabetes.org.