



# Medications on Pesach

Medications on Pesach is a sensitive subject both medically and halachically. Unlike most other year-round forbidden foods, the restrictions of Chametz (leavened grain material and its bi-products) on Pesach govern not only its consumption (*issur achila*), but also deriving any benefit (*issur ha'naah*). This article will focus on the basics of taking medications on Pesach. Regardless of the following article, exercise extreme caution and consult with your doctor and rabbi before making a decision not to take medicine.

The OU publishes a list of non-food items that are acceptable to use on Pesach even without special Pesach certification. Many of these items are approved because the OU has determined that they do not contain Chametz. Still others are recommended even though there is a possibility that they may actually contain Chametz. How can that possibly be?

The Talmud (*Avodah Zara 67b*) teaches that although one is forbidden to eat a non-slaughtered animal, but once the meat spoils, the prohibition is removed. Halacha recognizes two levels of inedibility; Items that are unfit for human consumption, and items that would not even be eaten by a canine. Most non-kosher foods, including non-slaughtered animals, lose their non-kosher status once

they reach the threshold of being unfit for human consumption.

Regarding chametz, the halacha is different. A spoiled loaf of bread that would still be eaten by a dog must be destroyed before Pesach. This is because although a human would not eat such bread, they can still use it to ferment other dough. The Torah does not only forbid owning chametz (edible), it also specifically forbids owning sourdough (inedible). Only once bread becomes so spoiled that even a dog would not eat it does it lose its status of chametz. However, there is one more caveat. Even if one incinerates chametz before Pesach, one is still forbidden to eat the ashes. This is due to the principle of *achshivei* (giving importance). By consuming the charred remnants of the chametz, one is attesting to the fact that one still considers it a food.

On a Rabbinic level this is forbidden. However, one is permitted to own and benefit from incinerated chametz and the same applies to chametz that is *nifsal* (disqualified) to the extent that it would no longer be eaten by a dog.

Known and tested medications in the form of creams, non-chewable pills and injections may be owned, used and consumed on Pesach, even if they contain chametz or kitniyot, since they are inedible. This covers most medicines used by adults. However, if an equally effective chametz-free alternative is available or procurable, this should be used instead. It is permissible to grind pills and mix the powder into food items so that a child can

The OU Israel Gustave & Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education was created to raise awareness and educate the public in all areas of kashrut. Rabbi Ezra Friedman, Deputy Rabbinic Administrator for OU Kosher Israel is the Center's director.



take medicine on Pesach. However, a doctor must be consulted to make sure that the child is getting the correct dosage and that the potency of the pill is not compromised by altering its consistency.

Liquid medicines, chewable pills and pills coated with a flavored glaze are considered palatable and may contain chametz. If substitution is not possible and the person is in a state of *sakana* or *safek sakana* (any possible danger to human life), the medication may be owned and consumed. The same applies if the condition is not yet a *safek sakana* but may deteriorate to that point.

A rabbi should be consulted as to whether it is preferable to purchase the medicine before or during Pesach, and as to how to dispose of the medicine once the danger passes. If substitution is not possible and a doctor determines that there is no possibility of *sakana* if the person does not take the medicine, a rabbi should be consulted. He may be able to determine that the medicine does not contain chametz and/or kitniyot, or he may decide that the medicine may be consumed due to the seriousness of the patient's condition. Unless an equivalent alternative is available, medicinal items which contain kitniyot are permitted for people who are ill. Questions on this issue should be directed to your rabbi. ■

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