

***My Own Meal*® Preparation Alternatives for Institutions**

Remember that our *My Own Meal*® tray meals come to you fully cooked so you are just warming them up for optimal taste and consumer preference. They can be consumed as-is, particularly in emergencies.

Preparing meals in mass is much different from heating individual MOM food trays in a kosher microwave. The diverse equipment available at one institution versus another means that one set of instructions will not address all situations. We offer alternatives that multiple institutions told us they employ to help you find the best preparation method for your situation.

Not all of the alternatives are optimal, but if you consider the kosher issues when preparing and serving, then you will likely find a workable solution for your situation.

These are guidelines of preparation times and temperatures, but your results depend upon the number of meals heated together and the power of the equipment used. You may need to experiment a bit to find the optimum mix for your situation.

Goal

The goal is to heat the meals to an acceptable consumer temperature when served while not violating kosher rules.

General kosher considerations

- Do not mix types of meals in the same heating unit at the same time. For example, meat meals should not be heated together with dairy or pareve meals in the same heating unit at the same time.
- Do not heat non-kosher and kosher meals in the same heating unit at the same time.
- Meat meals require double wrapping. (see [double wrapping](#) section below)
- We recognize that some of the alternatives in practice discussed below by-pass these general considerations. We do not recommend these options but list them as what is being done in practice by some, to offer ideas to find your own solutions.

Double wrapping

The double wrapping rule pertains to meat meals. The idea is that nothing gets into the meal to contaminate it with non-kosher food. The theory is that if something gets past the first barrier there is another barrier to protect the meal.

Hot water reheating

Do not put meals into boiling water to heat; otherwise, the temperature difference will likely cause most of the lids to pop off making a messy pot and unusable meals.

It is better to boil the water and put it in a pan with *My Own Meal*® food trays in a single layer. The water should come up on the sides of the tray. Do not put boiling water on the lid. Water at 180F can be put on top as they sit in the pan. Let them sit for about 10 minutes to warm. Usually the meal will reach an internal temperature of about 140F this way.

If there is a heat source under the pan, then keep the water from boiling and away from the lids, so they do not puff up and pop open. Again, refer to the [double wrapping](#) requirements section.

Microwave oven reheating

You do not need a dedicated kosher microwave oven because you are just reheating meals in a protected manner. If you were not protecting the meals, you would technically need three separate microwave ovens; one for meat, one for dairy and one for pareve. The dedicated kosher microwave would have the same issues as using a common microwave, in that you cannot cook meat with dairy meals one after the other in the same oven without first *kashering* the microwave. This would mean that you would need to clean the oven and then let it rest for 24 hours before cleaning it again for heating meals. Therefore, protecting the meals allows you to use a common microwave oven.

To heat in a common microwave, wipe out any noticeable spills in the microwave.



Open the MOM carton;



Vent the corner of the tray by pulling the lid back slightly on one corner;



Then return the entire meal tray to the carton with the vented side inserted first.

Put an individual MOM meal in the microwave and heat for about one minute. The time needed depends on the power of the microwave. Usually one minute is long enough if it is a commercial microwave.

The outer box is one of the two layers of wrap and the slightly vented top and plastic tray is the second layer, so the **double wrapping** rule is met. Since steam is going out of the vented lid as the meal heats, the rabbis have determined that the opening for venting does not negate the double wrapping requirement, even if the side flaps open.

If concerned, you can always put a paper plate, paper towel, or napkin under and above the box for further protection, but it is not required.

For reference, most frozen meals have hundreds of small holes in the foil or plastic wrap for venting, so the vented corner is the same principle.

Vertical Steamers

When putting a meat meal into a vertical steamer, first remove it from the carton. The meal should then be wrapped with a wrap barrier, or put into a ziplock bag to meet the **double wrapping** rule for meat meals. Depending upon the temperature, the meals can be heated at a lower temperature for a longer period of time. Caution: do not to let the temperature approach boiling or the lid may come loose, creating a kosher issue of an opened container.

Warming Ovens

Caution, MOM food trays are not intended for, nor produced for, dry heat reheating. My Own Meal® food trays are not dual-ovenable. They should not be allowed to be heated in dry heat, or the plastic could melt.

An unopened MOM tray without the carton could be put into a pan of hot water into the warming oven as if cooking custard. See **hot water reheating** section.

We have one customer which met success after experimenting. Its food service personnel do put the entire unopened carton with the tray inside, into a warming oven following the procedures discussed below. At this location, there are both non-kosher and kosher meals being reheated at low temperatures for a long period of time.



For control purposes, this customer puts each unopened carton with the unopened tray inside the box, into an ovenable plastic tray and shrink wraps the package with an ovenable plastic shrink wrap. A photo is shown above. In this way, they have determined that:

- It is easier for staff to quickly serve religious meals since they know the over-wrapped meals are identified for kosher (or halal) customers (they actually do it for both kosher and halal).
- The meals are staged in the portable heating ovens and transported to other locations during the day for later serving.
- At this location, most My Own Meal® food trays are heated in a microwave. However, in its lockdown units, a Carter Hoffman retherm oven is used to heat 72 kosher and non-kosher meals. The ovens are preheated to 320F and the over-wrapped meals, as shown in the photo, are put into the warmer for 30-50 minutes until the meals reach 165F.

Other Food Service Questions

Should I freeze the meals?

No. Our meals should be protected from freezing because they are designed for ambient storage conditions. Refrigeration is NOT required and they should never be stored in the freezer. Freezing may damage the quality of the meals. Long-term storage consistently between 50F (10C) and 80F (26C) assures optimal shelf life integrity

Can *My Own Meal*® kosher meals be eaten unheated?

Yes. Although the meals are intended to be heated before eating, they are perfectly safe to eat cold, especially in emergency situations where heating is not an option.

How should the meals be stored?

Our meals are designed for ambient storage conditions, not too hot and not too cold! Either freezing or storage at high temperatures could damage the quality of the meals. To assure shelf life integrity, store unopened food pouch or food tray *My Own Meal*® meals in the food storage pantry, or in your office.

Once the meal is heated, it should be consumed and must not be returned to the shelf for storage. If the meal is opened, it should be put into a storage container and promptly refrigerated as all prepared food items are handled.

Meals are not shelf stable once opened.