

Eating Rules for Ekadashi

What to eat or not to eat on Ekadashi?



What Constitutes " Grains " on Ekadashi /
What should I avoid eating on Ekadashi??

(There has been a lot of confusion over the years about what to eat and what not to eat on Ekadashi. Today we are no nearer to what is permissible or not on Ekadashi as there are many ways to observe Ekadashi, and there is no definitive Guidebook/Law-book on it. Some practitioners have a more strict set of guidelines regarding individual ingredients, so such a list would be simultaneously helpful and controversial. Since more than just "Hare Krsna" devotees observe Ekadashi these days, and since the borders have been blurred for some, this has been the cause of confusion. We shall on our website "go out on a limb" and publicly announce to the world that this is what you can and can't consume on Ekadashi. We are pursuing this matter rather seriously because certain Hindu organizations don't want to publicly state what can and what can't be consumed on this most holy of days due to the fact that lots of foods are still grey areas. We at **DIPIKA** are never far from controversy because we can handle the heat.

The gold standard would be to fast on Ekadashi without consuming a drop of water and to remain awake for the night. Srila Prabhupad saw the impracticality of this in the modern age and advised, that we abstain from "grains and beans" on this day and increase our devotional service with additional chanting. This being said we advocate the standard set by Srila Prabhupad. This is not to say that there are no other standards out there, some more and others less stringent. We do not wish to argue the merits of the various approaches but provide this information as a guide to allow individuals to decide wish option to exercise.

We feel there is a lot of misconceptions about Ekadashi. When you read the kathas on Ekadashi, the heroes and characters of the kathas derive enormous benefit from accidentally (or unconsciously) observing this holy Vrat/fast. If you receive that kind of punya karma (blessings/merits/mercy) from unconsciously fasting surely people who knowingly attempt the vrat can't be worse off? Everyone needs to start somewhere, you can't start observing every Ekadashi as Nirjala (the

Ekadashi fast that comes in June where no water is consumed) immediately, it often takes time and sometimes people are never able to follow it up. But rather than Ekadashi being projected as impossible to observe, we should make clear the **BASICS** and urge individuals to perform the Ekadashi fast correctly. Many websites seem to simply demoralize individuals by publishing long lists of prohibited foods (I am better than you? nana-nana-nana type of syndrome). This is so unfortunate that when we think after reading about the benefits of Ekadashi on that day so many benefits are bestowed upon the individual but apparently eating a Brinjal (Eggplant) which is not a grain and not a meat derivative (including onion, garlic, et al) is catastrophic. Hmmmm...

Grains must be avoided on Ekadashi as they have a detrimental effect on our body. On Ekadashi with regards to the Moon, the Moon plays havoc on our body. During this time on Earth we have catastrophes like Typhoons, Tidal Waves, Tsunamis and so forth. So the water in the sea and so many other things are severely effected by the position of the moon. There was also a research done in hospitals to find out when most patients died and they found out that it happens within the 5 days of Ekadashi. The reason for this is that the foodstuff they ate retains the water and since the moon plays such havoc with water, it effects our health adversely.

The essence of this fast is to decrease eating and sleeping so that one can spend as much time as possible on hearing, chanting and remembering Shree Krishna. There are some practitioners whose diet on Ekadashi are much more strict than others. Those who fully observe this fast do not eat, drink or sleep on this day. Others consume fruits and milk and spend more time being absorbed in chanting the Lord's names and reading our scriptures. To increase the austerity means to increase the benefit of this fast! So some follow a stricter regime, but one should not impose it on anyone else. That's not cool.

We can quote so many do's-and-don'ts yet Srila Prabhupada gave us a simpler and easier formulae for observing Ekadashi. Srila Prabhupada, understanding the inadequacies of present day society, did not insist on a very strict following of Ekadashi, other than refraining from mainly rice, dhal and beans - expecting devotees to increase their hearing and chanting of the Lord's names and pastimes. There is a variety of prohibited vegetables (carrot, eggplant, broccoli, etc.) mentioned in our scriptures esp the Kurma Purana, but Srila Prabhupada never enforced this rule, nor followed it himself. Thus it is acceptable on Ekadashi for devotees to consume any vegetable while refraining from mainly rice, bean and dhal. A complete fast, even from water was not expected by Srila Prabhupada or his followers. Still if one is able to perform this austerity, with increased hearing and chanting it was very much appreciated by Srila Prabhupada.

In India most people who fast on this day refrain from a range of vegetables including tomatoes, cauliflower, eggplant, lady fingers (Okra/Bindi) and leafy vegetables and do not use any spices except pepper, rock salt and cumin (Jeera). Srila Prabhupada specified food grains and beans (pulses) as foods that must be avoided on Ekadashi. One may use spices for cooking. You should not use powdered Asafoetida (hing), since it generally contains grains. The whole Asafoetida (hing) which is black in colour is used instead. All grains, pulses and beans either whole or ground into flour: rice, wheat, chick-peas (besan), soya, barley, millet, rye, all dhals and dried beans, and anything that contains these ingredients: papadams, tofu, pasta, grain beverages. Vegetables such as green beans, corn, peas ([read below what we say about this](#)), Oils made from grains: corn oil, soya oil, and products that may have been fried in these. Please note that snacks fried in “vegetable oil” may have been fried in the oils listed above.

What about Sunflower oil??? It is sunflower so that is a seed and not a grain but you can use pure butter ghee simply because we cannot vouch for the sanctity of the refining process for the oil. I also use pure unsalted butter sometimes. That is why I suggest that people purchase unsalted butter just for that day. You can purchase the small butter for R18 and that is enough for a few Ekadashi preps. Personally that is what I do on Ekadashi or else I use extra virgin olive oil.

Do not use any cooking ingredients that might be mixed with grains, such as ghee that has been used to fry puris, or spices touched by hands dusted with flour. There is absolutely NO doubt about what is NOT permissible to eat on Ekadashi... ANNA (grains). However it is how you translate this word that makes the difference. Srila Prabhupada said "Fruits, Roots, Nuts, Milk". If you stick to these types of foods you should be fine. Of course the sure way is to fast completely. Water of course can be taken. Except if you wish to do Nirjala Fast.

* Someone who is very strictly observing Ekadashi should avoid all spices except pepper, rock salt and cumin. Individuals may observe these rules if they choose, either making their own arrangements for cooking on Ekadashi, eating uncooked foods such as fruit, or observing a full fast.

Mahaprashad on Ekadashi: On Ekadashi, strict followers of Vaishnava (devotees of Lord Vishnu) regulations avoid eating any mahaprashad from an offering that includes grains. The shastra explains that the papa-purusha (sin personified) takes shelter in grains on Ekadashi, and therefore we avoid grains at all costs on that day, not even risking taking non-grain preparations of Mahaprashad from an offering plate containing grains. Ekadashi mahaprashad should be stored until the next day; if that is not possible it can be distributed to persons not strictly following Vaishnava regulations or to animals. In fact, mahaprashad maintains its purity on Ekadashi despite the presence of the papa-purusha, and therefore it will purify anyone who eats it. Nevertheless, the

followers of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, being strict followers of Vaishnava regulations, avoid mahaprashad on that day because their strict sadhana will be hampered by the presence of the papa-purusha.

From an Ayurvedic perspective, especially if one is fasting entirely, or even just taking water, the malas (stools) absorb the toxins in the body when fasting. So on the day the fast is broken it is a good idea to take a gentle laxative consisting of 50-50 warm milk and water, with some rock candy to sweeten it. Generally 4-5 cups are drunk (up to 7) and within half an hour to an hour one will expel the malas. After this at lunch time one takes one's meal of prashadam.

So once again these are the foods, spices etc you can and can't have on Ekadashi.

One shouldn't get started about seeds because bananas have seeds and the potato and tomato that everyone eats is also a "seed". The best principle is articulated below.

One MUST abstain from all types of grains and beans (including derivatives and anything containing grain/beans) – this is clearly articulated and not in question. Also for non vegetarians clearly the additional restrictions of no meat, onion and garlic will be relevant. Beyond that we do not see any value in adding to a list of restrictions BUT we did anyway :). This most holy of days should not be spent in trying to side step a minefield of taboo foods, which frankly is the impression many are left with constantly. For most Ekadashi seems to be "what do I avoid day" instead of the "increase my thoughts of LORD KRISHNA DAY".

NB:- All ingredients used on non-Ekadashi days must not be used on Ekadashi since the possibility exists that grain may have mixed into it. It is best to keep separate containers for spices, butter, sugar etc that will be used on Ekadashi. Masalas and spice mixes purchased from stores are known to sometimes contain grains, onion, and garlic. It is thus best to make one's own masalas.

What is the difference between a "grain" and a "seed"?

What is the technical difference between a grain and a seed? Technically, a grain is a fruit with a single seed fused, while a seed is an ovule (think 'egg') with an embryo enclosed within. In the case of wheat, the flour we derive is mainly the ground up fruit part of the grain, the wheatgerm being the seed part fused within the grain. In the case of, for instance, the Millet, the ovule part of the seed is so 'meaty', comparatively speaking, it has properties reminiscent of the fruit part of grains, and in culinary terms we therefore treat them similarly to a grain.

Some "grain-like seeds" are used as grains like Quinoa, Amaranth, Buckwheat and Millet. Wheat, Rice, spelt (another form of wheat) and oats are clear-cut

grains. Sesame mustard, and pumpkin seeds are, well, "seeds". But these all sprout if you put them in water.

In seeds like peas and pea-likes, parts of the seed's embryo, the food storage ones that allow the embryonic plant to push up to reach the surface when planted and germinated, are, when the seeds (peas) are dried, so mealy in their properties, we can grind them up to produce 'flour' (like chickpea gram flour, for instance), i.e. a substance that, in culinary terms, reminds us of the properties of grain flour and so we treat them as though they were actually ground up grains.

Ingredients that one CAN consume on Ekadashi:-

- * Clean salt (meaning salt that only used on Ekadashi and not on any other day).
- * Clean sugar (meaning sugar that only used on Ekadashi and not on any other day).
- * Clean oil (meaning oil that only used on Ekadashi and not on any other day).
- * Pure unsalted butter, ghee, oil (except those made from grains: corn oil, soya oil)
- * Use oils like Helios oil (made with sunflower seeds) coconut oil, peanut oil
- * Spices like Turmeric (ground from raw form), Hing (in its raw form), cinnamon sticks, bay leaves, ground/whole pepper, Tamarind, Cardamom (Elachie), Nutmeg (Jaifar), Cloves, Ginger, Chillies (green or dried red), curry leaves, mint (pudina), coriander (dhanian/cilantro), thyme, saffron, Basil, Parsley, paprika, nigella seeds, poppy seeds...
- * Potatoes, Maas (yogurt), condensed milk, cottage cheese, fresh cream, sour cream, yogurt, Rooibos tea, Green Tea, peppers, green bananas, paneer, coconut, desiccated coconut, raisins, jaggery (Gur), Pista (Pistachio), Badam (Almonds), Cashew-nut, cucumber, karela (bittermelon), poppy seeds, pumpkin seeds, rosewater, lemon juice, lemons, peanuts, Cabbage, butternut, gem squash, lettuce, all kinds of fruits...
- * **Masala** (If you make your own masala that's fine but I would NOT recommend purchasing it from shops as these have powdered grains in it). The composition of masala differs regionally, with wide variety across India. Some common ingredients in this [Dipika's Ekadashi Masala](#) are black & white peppercorns, dried red chilli peppers, ginger powder, curry leaves, sesame seeds, mustard seeds, ground turmeric from the turmeric stick, Soomph (fennel), cloves, long pepper (aka pippali), jeera, cinnamon, elachie, nutmeg, star aniseed and dhanian seeds. Of course some may add other non-grain ingredients. Varying combinations of these and other spices are used in regional variants of masala, none of which is considered more authentic than another.
- * **Chilli powder** (If you make your own Chilli powder that's fine but I would NOT recommend purchasing it from shops as these have powdered grains in it). Chilli powder is a generic name for any powdered spice mix composed chiefly of chilli peppers, most commonly either red peppers or cayenne peppers, which are both of

the species *Capsicum annuum*. It can be made from virtually any hot pepper including ancho, Cayenne, Jalapeno, New Mexico, and pasilla chillis. Some common ingredients in this [Dipika's Ekadashi Chilli Powder](#) is pure powdered chillies, cayenne, jeera, oregano, salt, black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, nutmeg, and turmeric. Of course some may add other non-grain ingredients. Varying combinations of these and other spices are used in regional variants of Chilli powder, none of which is considered more authentic than another.

* Methi (fenugreek) seeds:- Fenugreek comes from the *Trigonella foenum-graecum* plant in the family Fabaceae and is a seed from the plant.

* Jeera (Cumin):- is derived from the flower and is not a bean or pod. (Iskcon's Juhu temple serves Kadhi with jeera). Kurma Das (www.kurma.net) says “ I have always understood Jeera to be absolutely fine on Ekadashi. The Whole seeds not the powder (unless ground by yourself.) Jeera is the dried seed of the herb *Cuminum cyminum*, a member of the parsley family. The cumin plant is a herbaceous plant, with the fruit containing a single seed.

* Soomph (Fennel):- Fennel is a perennial herb. It is derived from the flower and is not a bean or pod. The fruit is a dry seed.

* Sago (aka Saigo) Saigo is from a cycad plant - similar to a palm tree. It is the seeds of the cones of the cycad plant and it's the starch extracted from the pith of sago palm stems. So Saigo is a seed and hence can be consumed on Ekadashi.

* Cheese like Tussers, Parmasen, mozzarella, feta, with NO animal rennet in them

* Vanilla is a POD {the vessel that contains the seeds of a plant (not the seeds themselves)} is not a bean.

* Buckwheat, quinoa (although it resembles a grain, it is technically a grass), or tapioca (One must confirm that these items are not mixed with grains)

Ingredients that one CAN'T consume on Ekadashi:-

As a rule of thumb we suggest you avoid products like ready-mixed masala's and ready-ground products. This is simply because products like ready-ground hing are sometimes mixed with rice flour which renders them unusable on Ekadashi. We therefore suggest that you use only whole products like pure resin hing on Ekadashi.

* Any type of Grains viz. cereal, bread, wheat, flour, rice, dhals, roti, chapati...

* All types of beans

- * Masala (Not to say you can't use it. Yes if you make your own masala {like we have given above} that's fine but I would not recommend purchasing it from shops as these have powdered grains in it)
- * Green beans
- * Coffee, or typical tea like 5 roses
- * Onions and garlic
- * Any type of meat
- * Spices like powdered hing, powdered shop turmeric.
- * Cheeses with animal rennet in them (like most of the normal Clover cheeses)
- * Some Milk powders, it is found, generally contains soy lecithin, a derivative of soy grain.
- * Corn starch - often used as a sweetener in many products. (Soft drinks...)
- * Starches made from corn or grains and products made from and mixed with these starches like ground spices and hing, baking soda, baking powder, custard, certain yogurts, puddings, cream cheese, candy.
- * Do not use any cooking ingredients that may have been mixed with grains, such as ghee that has been used to fry purees or spices or salt touched by hands dusted with flour.

Grey Area ingredients:- (This should be interesting).

The ingredients below are in the grey department and you can use your own discretion to consume them or not. It seems everyone has an opinion on the below.

- * Some authorities advise not to consume tomatoes (which by the way is a fruit and not a vegetable), carrots, potatoes, cauliflower, eggplant, turnips and beetroots, figs, pumpkin, lady fingers (Okra/Bindi) and spinach and other leafy vegetables **BUT I DONT SEE THE GRAINS IN THESE FOODS**. So for me common sense always prevails. Srila Prabhupada said stay away from beans and grains... **KEEP IT SIMPLE**.
- * Eggplant (Brinjal) - Vaishnavas of the Lakshmi Sampradaya tend to avoid eggplant, so does lots of South Indian temples.
- * Sesame seeds (Til): - Sesame seeds comes from Sesamum indicum which is a flowering plant in the genus Sesamum. It is cultivated for its edible seeds, which grow in pods. As the name suggests it's a seed and not a grain. Srila Prabhupad used Sesame seeds.

* Mustard seeds: - Mustard (black) seeds comes from the Brassica nigra plant. As the name suggests it's a seed and not a grain. Srila Prabhupad often used mustard seeds. Yamuna devi uses Mustard seeds in her Ekdashi recipes.

* OILS: - Reading the above on Mustard and Sesame seeds should answer weather we can use these oils or not.

Srila Prabhupada used sesame seeds, mustard seeds, and peanuts – Refer to Yamuna's Table Cookbook.

* Peas: - A pea is most commonly the small spherical seed or the seed-pod of the legume Pisum sativum. Each pod contains several peas. Pea-pods are botanically a fruit, since they contain seeds developed from the ovary of a (pea) flower. However, peas are considered to be a vegetable in cooking. **BUT ON THE OTHER HAND** if we can consume peas then we can have dhal, isn't it? But dhal is not allowed on Ekdashi. As we know from the kathas of Ekdashi that Paapa-purusha (sin personified) hides only in grains on the day of Ekdashi and not in seeds and so forth. This one is seriously tricky, it is true that it is not a grain but a legume and therefore falls into the bean family. However it is true that Srila Prabhupad extended the definition of grain to not just rice but all grain in the form of wheat, barley, beans etc. To be safe it is worth avoiding.

Pseudo grains and flours that may be used on Ekdashi (Courtesy from Kurma Das – www.kurma.net)

* Amaranth Flour (rajgira atta): Milled from the seeds of the amaranth plant, this flour boasts a higher percentage of protein than most other grains, and has more fibre than wheat and rice. It is also higher in the amino acid lysine, which some food scientists believe makes it a more complete protein than flour made from other grains. Amaranth flour can be used in cookies, crackers, baking mixes, and cereals. Amaranth can also be purchased as a “puffed cereal” in wholefood shops.

* Arrowroot Flour: The rootstalks of a tropical plant are the source of this flour, often used as a thickener for sauces and desserts; the finely powdered arrowroot turns completely clear when dissolved (giving gloss to sauces), and adds no starchy flavor. Because of its easy digestibility, it is also an used as an ingredient in cookies intended for infants and young children. You can use it as a grain-free substitute to corn flour.

* Buckwheat Flour: A common ingredient in pancake mixes, buckwheat flour is also used to make Japanese soba noodles. It is available in light, medium, and dark varieties (the dark flour boasts the strongest flavor), depending on the kind of buckwheat it is milled from. You can make your own buckwheat flour by

processing whole white buckwheat groats in a blender or food processor. Buckwheat groats (use only the dehusked variety) can be cooked like rice.

* Chestnut Flour: This tan flour is made from chestnuts, the meaty, lowfat nuts that are often served as a vegetable. The flour is a little sweet and is traditionally used in Italian holiday desserts. Italian shops sell it.

* Potato Flour (potato starch): Steamed potatoes are dried and then ground to a powder to make this gluten-free flour, which is commonly used in baked goods for Jewish Passover (when wheat flour may not be used).

* Quinoa (pronounced Keen-wah) Flour: Higher in fat than wheat flour, quinoa flour makes baked goods more moist. You can make your own quinoa flour by processing whole quinoa in a blender; stop before the flour is too fine - it should be slightly coarse, like cornmeal. Quinoa can also be cooked like rice.

* Tapioca Flour: Milled from the dried starch of the cassava root, this flour thickens when heated with water and is often used to give body to puddings, fruit pie fillings, and soups. It can also be used in baking.

* Water-chestnut Flour (water-chestnut powder): This Asian ingredient is a fine, powdery starch that is used to thicken sauces (it can be substituted for cornstarch) and to coat foods before frying to give them a delicate, crisp coating.

Of course the above won't be an issue if you just consume milk
and fruits for the day which I highly recommend.

In conclusion we would like to sum up the debate on the observance of Ekdashi with the following thoughts. There can be no question of the benefits of observing Ekdashi. Every recitation of the benefits of the day shows that even those who **accidentally or inadvertently** observe the day have derived enormous benefit. Therefore on this day let us immerse ourselves in the thoughts of the Lord, and in reduced eating. For as long as the Ekdashi fasting does not become Ekdashi feasting one will derive benefits. We would advise to start slowly by initially giving up grains and then progressing to consuming only one grain free meal on Ekdashi. If possible and if one desires it one can work oneself up to fasting every Ekdashi as Nirjala Ekdashi. This however is the Gold Standard which many will never achieve unfortunately. Therefore let the focus of this most holy day rather be thoughts of the Lord rather than side- stepping a minefield of prohibited foods.

We can advise YOU about what to eat or not but ultimately YOU must make
YOUR own decision on what to consume or not.

REMEMBER ONCE AGAIN

My humble advice is rather simple and this should be a thumb rule on Ekadashi...
(IF YOU CONSIDER SOMETHING AS GRAIN THEN JUST DON'T CONSUME.)

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Narottam das & Arjun Nandlal
[Email info@dipika.org.za](mailto:info@dipika.org.za)