

# Orthodox Jew Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: Israel

Primary Language(s): English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Aramaic

Percent of Iowa's Population: 0.1%

## Background

Israel is a small, densely populated state that sits mostly in an area known as Canaan with a population of 7,707,042 and became an independent state in 1948. Since Jews, Christians and Muslims consider Jerusalem as a holy city there is much fighting and turmoil in the area. The fighting and turmoil continue today from 2000 B.C. The Jewish people can trace their roots to the area to the biblical Abraham. The name Jew derives from Judah one of the twelve sons of Jacob. At different points in history the Jews have been scattered to other countries like the former Soviet Union, Germany, Arab countries and North Africa. The Jewish people were subject to great violence and massacres by Arab civilians and forces of neighboring Arab states. The Nazi regime, during WWII, killed about 6 million Jews creating the tragedy known as the Holocaust. Many Jews came to the US to be able to practice their faith in peace with many settlements on the coast originally. Eventually, they moved to other areas of the US. By 1878 1,000 Jews had settled in Iowa, there were 3,000 by the late 1800's. In the early 1900s more Jewish immigrants came, but from eastern Europe, particularly Russia. By 1916 the Jewish population was up to 9,000. Currently 4% of Jews live in the Midwest, while 43% live in the Northeast United States.



## Education and Literacy

Education is very important. Traditional curriculum includes a large amount of text study, little effort is devoted to sciences, arts or vocational knowledge. Postville has a private Jewish school, from Pre-K to 9<sup>th</sup> grade with boys attending one school and girls a separate school with different studies. Children are sent to larger cities for higher education

## Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

The Orthodox Jew will go to Synagogue 3 times a day. Men wear a small hat called a yarmulke. Women wear wigs, scarves or hats. Orthodox Jews dress modestly for women this includes long dark skirts and head covering and men wear dark pants and long overcoats over a white shirt. They are family oriented and have large families. They only eat Kosher food that is permitted in the Torah. Their Sabbath is Saturday (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday) a special rest day. They are not allowed to work, turn on the lights or operating machines on the Sabbath. Walking into churches, non-Kosher restaurants, tattoos and shaving with a razor all considered taboo. Jews are expected to marry other Jews and most marriages are arranged by the Rabbi or family members.

## Holidays & Celebrations

There are three major religious holidays, Passover, Shavuot and Sukkoth, there are some minor celebrations as well. The holidays and celebrations commemorate different periods or occurrences of miracles in the history of Judaism. Holidays may be a single day or up to eight days and involve different rituals or practices including special prayers, dietary restrictions or special meals and foods for just that celebration and dress codes that may vary from day to day life. There is no work on the holidays or operation of machines, just like the Sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday). All holidays and celebrations are a happy and joyous time and are celebrated with family and friends with special unique parties referred to as Seudot.

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## Health Disparities

1 in 3 Jews of Eastern European descent are carriers for certain genetic diseases felt to be due to the common ancestry many Jews share. Diseases common to all Jewish Groups: Cystic Fibrosis, Glycogen Storage Disease Type II, Wilson Disease, Tay-Sachs Disease, Fragile X Syndrome, SMA and Thalassemia. Jews have to consult with Rabbi regarding medical decisions or get permission for C-sections or a hysterectomy. They must avoid discharge to home and elevators during the Sabbath. Men stay out of the delivery room. Men do not shake hands with women.

## Traditional Foods & Meal Patterns

Orthodox Jews follow the laws of the Torah and only eat Kosher foods. They may eat any animal with cloven hooves and chews its cud, so cattle, sheep, goats, deer and bison are kosher. Pork and shellfish are forbidden but fish with fins and scales are allowed. Fowl such as chicken, geese, ducks and turkey are allowed. The mammals and birds must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law. Fruits and vegetables are kosher but need to be washed and free of bugs. Orthodox Jews are prohibited from eating meat and dairy together.

## Considerations for WIC

- Kosher foods affect the milk, yogurt and cheese part of the food package and availability may be limited or not offered, tofu and Soy milk options are sometimes preferred and at times easier to find in Kosher options
- if men come to the appointment they won't want to shake hands or acknowledge females not their spouse, women are very reserved and private and do not share a lot of extra information
- they will not attend clinic on any of their holidays or celebrations, the Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar and not the same as our calendar
- Jewish families are very connected to other Jewish families in their community of belief, but do not associate much with others outside their faith, often quite educated.
- Families may leave the country for a few months and return to Israel especially pregnant women expecting a male child so at time scheduling appointments is a struggle.
- For Gestational Diabetics may need to discuss fasting which is a part of many holidays as well as many holiday foods are sweetened with honey and /or dried fruit so may affect blood sugars.
- Utensils, plates, pots and pans used for cooking dairy foods must be separate from utensils, plates pots and pans used for meats as they are never allowed to be eaten together or touch so most Jewish households have 2 sets of everything including dishwashers it's basically like having 2 separate kitchens.

## What's the Iowa Connection?

There have been Jewish settlers in Iowa since 1848, almost all the Jews that moved to Iowa before 1900 were emigrants from Germany. They hoped to be able to practice their Jewish religion and customs in peace in the United States. Currently there are less than 6,000 Jews and half of them live in Des Moines. Postville has a Kosher meat packing plant that has attracted many Jewish families to the small rural Iowa town.



Traditional Matzo balls

## How are we Living?

Most Orthodox Jewish families live in single-family households with lots of children. All men and some of the women drive cars. They use cell phones and use other forms of technology but are very wary of the internet and television is considered off limits. Orthodox Jews have high levels of religious commitment and a strong attachment to Israel.

