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**LAMB & LENTIL STEW**: Tender lamb joins a medley of tomatoes, lentils, onions, chickpeas, zucchini and red and green sweet peppers. Aromatic herbs and spices invite all to taste and enjoy this truly delicious meal.

**LAMB & BARLEY STEW**: Tender lamb, combined with barley, eggplant, red and green sweet peppers, zucchini and onions, create a true culinary delight! A scrumptious meal with a variety of textures, it is deliciously seasoned with herbs and spices of the Middle East.

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**CHICKEN & NOODLES**: A winning combination with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, homestyle Kluski noodles, peas and carrots in a lightly seasoned sauce.

**CHICKEN & BLACK BEANS**: A scrumptious meal with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, black & kidney beans, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet peppers and corn. Simple spicing brings out its full flavor!

**BEEF STEW**: A satisfying and delicious stew! It has chunks of lean beef, with potatoes, sweet peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, zucchini, chickpeas and carrots in a flavorful sauce.

**OLD WORLD STEW**: Chunks of lean beef, with brown rice, tomatoes, zucchini and pinto beans. The sauce is seasoned with the aromatic flavors of the Middle East.

**PASTA WITH GARDEN VEGETABLES**: This delicious and robust meal has rotini pasta with peppers, mushrooms, zucchini and tomatoes. It is perfectly flavored with traditional Italian seasonings.

**VEGETARIAN STEW**: A meal fit for vegetarian and hearty eater alike! With macaroni, vegetables, potatoes, barley, lentils, peanuts and seasonings, this meal has great taste and a variety of textures.

**CHEESE TORTELLINI**: Cheese-filled tortellini are simply delicious in a well-seasoned tomato sauce, with the added protein and texture of pinto beans.

**FLORENTINE LASAGNA**: A meal influenced by the tastes of Florence. Savor the combination of small lasagna noodles in a tomato sauce with Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses, spinach and pinto bean pieces which add texture and protein.
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Assalamu Alaikum,

Ramadan is fast-approaching, but do you ever fast outside of this blessed month? Some studies suggest infrequent fasting could be good for your health. Find out more in "Fasting for Your Health."

Something else good for your health? Fermented foods! If you’re not familiar with the term, it might not sound appealing. But, there are several common foods that fit into this category, like yogurt. Learn about the other foods and their benefits in “Fueling the Body with Fermented Foods.”

What part of the world do you live in? Is it typically hot or are there long periods of cold weather? Is it rural or metropolitan? Is the air clean or polluted? Living my whole life in Chicagoland, I often notice when I travel to beachy climates I can breathe so much easier. Perhaps it’s the ocean air. In “How Do We Rank? A Global Review,” discover some of the ways in which where we live can affect our well-being.

If you have children, you understand the challenges of feeding them nutritious foods while dining out. It seems a majority of restaurants have a wide array of options for adults, yet the same limited choices on the kids’ menu ($5 for a tiny portion of boxed mac and cheese does not fit my bill). See what else is out there as we go on “The Hunt for Healthy Kids’ Meals.”

This issue is also filled with great information about “Extraordinary Barley” and “L-Cysteine: A Friend to Our Bodies,” plus tasty and nutritious recipes.

I really hope you enjoy this issue, all the ones that came before it, and all the ones yet to come. This will be my last issue. I’ve greatly enjoyed my time as a member of the IFANCA family and content manager of Halal Consumer. It’s been an incredible experience and I thank you all (staff and readers alike) for all the input you’ve given me along the way. Please continue to send your feedback and ideas, whether via email, Facebook or Twitter.

Happy Reading!

Sincerely,
Alia Shalabi content manager
From the Publisher’s Desk

Assalamu Alaikum,

Once in a while we hear someone question the need for halal certification. While it is surprising to learn anyone in the United States is unaware of the need, it may be useful to occasionally remind ourselves why halal certification is necessary.

When consumers used to get their meat from the local butcher, their fruit and vegetables from their own garden or the local farmstand, and their bread from their own oven or the local bakery, consumers knew their suppliers and their suppliers knew them. They all adhered to the same dietary requirements, or the local shopkeepers knew what their customers wanted and made sure they met their needs. Once the local shops began carrying items from outside the area, the source of the food items became unclear. Industrialization made food formulations more complex and globalization brought foods from distant lands to the local shops. It became necessary to develop some form of verifying that food items met the religious dietary needs of the consumers. This was true for Muslims living in Muslim majority countries and was even more critical for Muslims living in non-Muslim majority countries. Hence the need for halal certification developed.

Another question we sometimes hear is why does everything need to be halal certified? Why do peanuts, cookies, or milk need to be halal certified? Raw or fresh food items that are halal in nature may not need to be certified if you get them from the source without any processing. However, once they undergo any processing, the opportunity exists for contamination with haram or questionable products. Halal certification confirms that the halal nature of the product has been maintained. This gives consumers peace of mind and assurance that the product they buy is clear of doubt. The Crescent-M logo (️) on a product label assures that the product you buy and serve to your family and guests is halal and tayyab (pure).

Sincerely,

Muhammad Munir Chaudry president

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Fueling the Body with Fermented Foods

By Aysha Hussain

While seeds and nuts will continue to reign supreme as the top superfoods for 2017, registered dietitians are simultaneously singing the praises of fermented foods like cultured yogurt and sauerkraut, according to national food trend survey “What’s Trending in Nutrition.”
The survey, conducted in December 2016 by Pollock Communications and Today’s Dietitian, tapped over 1,700 dietitians across the country to predict this year’s top 10 superfoods and other food trends. The results: not only did fermented or cultured foods (at times described as an acquired taste) outrank longtime favorite leafy green kale, they came in at number four on the list.

Food trends aside, Roni Enten Vissoker, an individualized biomedical nutritionist, says the interest in fermented foods reflect a larger shift in consumers’ mindsets on the positive effects of healthy food on the human body.

“There is a growing awareness of food and medicine,” says Vissoker. “It seems like the most popular food trends really have to do with healing the body and becoming healthier, even the role of food treating certain diseases.”

Vissoker, who recommends cultured foods to several of her clients because of their profound impact on health, hopes this particular trend is here to stay.

Believe it or not, many of the products we consume on a daily basis are fermented, such as coffee and even chocolate, but not all fermented foods are created equal when it comes to their health benefits. Foods like cultured yogurt and sauerkraut go through a specific type of fermentation called “lacto-fermentation” where the sugars in the milk and cabbage are converted into lactic acid by live bacteria such as Lactobacillus, Leuconostoc, and other lactic acid bacteria (LAB). The lactic acid that’s eventually produced is what gives cultured foods their distinct sour smell and tangy flavor, and what safely preserves them for several months. As a result of this process, probiotics, or “good” bacteria, are produced.

Extensive research has been conducted on the impact of probiotics, also referred to as “beneficial” bacteria. Several studies have shown consuming probiotic-rich foods help to balance out the one hundred trillion bacteria in our gut, which can improve digestion and treat gastrointestinal issues like diarrhea. Probiotic foods are especially valuable for boosting the immune system, as 70 percent of the immune system is located in the gut, can prevent allergies from occurring, ward off infections, protect against cardiovascular diseases, and even reduce cancer risk. Perhaps the most groundbreaking research is the emerging evidence that bacteria in the gut has an effect on the brain, a concept known as the “gut-brain connection.” While more trials need to be carried out, many mood-related and neurological conditions like depression, Parkinson’s disease, and autism have been linked with gut bacteria. A recent clinical trial, organized by researchers at Arizona State University, found that 18 children with autism all under 18 years old showed improved gastrointestinal issues and behavior after being administered a regimen of antibiotics, a bowel cleanse, and a daily fecal microbiota transplant (aka stool transplant) from a healthy donor over an eight-week period. The exploratory study, published in Microbiome, revealed the children experienced an 80 percent reduction in constipation, diarrhea, indigestion, and abdominal pain, and a 20 to 25 percent improvement in social skills and sleep habits that remained improved eight weeks after treatment.

When it comes to probiotics, lacto-fermented foods offer more than just good bacteria for the gut. The lactic acid that’s produced actually enhances the nutritional value in cabbage and other vegetables; enzymes and nutrients become more accessible to the body because the cell walls have been broken down by good bacteria. According to Vissoker, other types of fermentations such as yeast and mold may or may not be as beneficial as lacto-fermented foods. She adds that people with yeast and mold sensitivities should avoid things like sourdough bread (fermented using lactic acid and wild yeasts) and miso, which is made from fermented soybeans and undergoes mold fermentation, as these foods could exacerbate health conditions.

...in order to reap the most health benefits from cultured foods, you may want to try making them at home, as many fermented products sold in stores are the pasteurized kind, which kills off beneficial bacteria and other important nutrients.
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Feeling the fermented foods?
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Fermented foods that are rich in probiotics, nutrients, and enzymes include:

**Yogurt** — made from cow, goat, or sheep milk. A rule of thumb—look for varieties with “live and active cultures.” Cultured yogurt is high in protein and vitamins, including B12 and K, potassium, zinc, riboflavin, calcium, and phosphorus. Several Cabot Creamery yogurts are IFANCA halal-certified. For those who avoid animal products altogether, yogurt can also be made by using microorganisms to ferment coconut, almond, and soy milk.

**Kefir** — milk product that tastes like a drinkable yogurt, made from cow, goat, or sheep milk. Kefir contains vitamins such as B12 and K2, calcium, magnesium, biotin, folate, and enzymes.

**Cheese** — made from cow, goat, or sheep milk. Cheese is an excellent source of protein and calcium. A wide variety of IFANCA halal-certified cheeses are available from Cabot Creamery and Mariposa Dairy.

**Sauerkraut** — made from cabbage. Sauerkraut is not only high in fiber, it also contains iron, copper, calcium, manganese, magnesium, B-vitamins, and vitamins A, C, and K.

**Kimchi** — often made using Napa cabbage and daikon radish that gets combined with scallions, cucumber, ginger, red chili, and garlic. Similar to sauerkraut, kimchi is also high in fiber and vitamins A, B, and C and is known for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

**Pickles** — made from cucumbers. Pickles are high in folates and vitamin K.

**Tempeh** — made from soybeans. Tempeh is a great source of protein, fiber, and vitamin B2.

**Miso** — made from soybeans, barley, or brown rice with koji, a fungus. Miso is high in copper, manganese, and vitamin K.

**Kombucha** — made from black tea and sugar. Kombucha contains B-vitamins and enzymes.

The fermentation process as a whole is one of the most ancient forms of food preservation and continues to be widely used all over the world. Cultured milk products like kefir, known for its tart taste, is a popular drink across Eastern and Northern Europe, whereas dosas, a fermented crepe or pancake made from rice batter and black lentils, are a common breakfast and street food in Southern India.

One fermented product that’s become increasingly popular in the United States is kimchi, a spicy, red fermented cabbage (similar to sauerkraut) or radish dish. While kimchi is widely consumed throughout parts of Asia, it’s most associated with being a traditional Korean food staple.

Chef Wook Kang, a certified executive chef based in Chicago and an American Culinary Federation member, says he’s not entirely surprised by kimchi’s popularity as Korean food has steadily attracted more attention over the last decade. He attributes some of kimchi’s newfound status to well-known Korean chefs such as Roy Choi, co-owner and co-founder of Kogi BBQ, a Korean taco truck in Los Angeles, and David Chang, chef and founder of Momofuku in New York, who helped introduce Korean foods to mainstream audiences.

“‘The fact that Korean cuisine is now a very influential part of the American diner, a lot of people are familiar with what kimchi is now,’” says Kang. “‘And because of that Korean influence Americans are now more willing to try different foods.’”

Kang, who is also an assistant professor and culinary instructor at Kendall College, often enjoys serving up kimchi as an accompaniment to bibimbap, a traditional Korean mixed rice bowl, or his best-selling beet salad with pickled watermelon radish; but one of his favorite fermented foods is none other than sauerkraut.

“It can be cross utilized for so many things,” Kang adds. “I can make a soup out of it. I can make a stew out of it. I can add one to a stir fry. I can eat it cold. I can eat it warm.”

Kang says what he appreciates most about fermented foods is the fact that they can transform even a simple sandwich, adding freshness to each bite.

“I like the fact that it’s a great palate cleanser,” says Kang. “It really makes things go smoother. For instance, if I’m eating something more Indian-based or Indian-inspired, a yogurt-based sauce really balances out a lot of the heat [and] intensity of the dish.”
Both Kang and Vissoker agree that in order to reap the most health benefits from cultured foods, you may want to try making them at home, as many fermented products sold in stores are the pasteurized kind, which kills off beneficial bacteria and other important nutrients. If you’re new to fermentation, Kang stresses not to overthink the process. He suggests people start out simple by making homemade sauerkraut, a process that can potentially help people understand the foundation of fermenting. All you need is sliced cabbage, salt, and time.

“It can give a novice cook some confidence,” says Kang. “Put in the right conditions, you will not mess up at all. Ultimately, if it doesn’t look right (i.e., mold) you should trust yourself and not eat it.”

There are also many starter cultures available that can be used to make everything from cultured yogurt to kombucha, but if you’re not quite ready to take the plunge by making your own fermented products, Vissoker says to buy fermented foods from your local grocer, health store, or farmer’s market that are labeled “unpasteurized” and have “live and active cultures,” as these will provide good bacteria. Just as the fermentation process requires time, she recommends people looking to try cultured foods for the very first time to start out slow, beginning with a half cup to one cup a day, then eventually working your way up to a serving at each meal. However, those with gastrointestinal issues should consult with their practitioner before adding fermented foods to their diet.

“You’re talking [about] a very large number of bacteria, sometimes in the trillions of units of bacteria,” Vissoker adds. “Even though it’s a good thing, it can sometimes cause some digestive side effects that are unwanted initially, such as bloating or gas, for people with unbalanced gut bacteria.”

While many of these fermented products have been around for centuries, there is still so much to learn in terms of their impact on the human body. What we do know about cultured foods is that a little goes a long way. Fermented foods are packed with healthy bacteria and other important vitamins and minerals that are essential for overall health, so it should come as no surprise that these nutrient-rich foods are well on their way to becoming a long-standing superfood of the future.

AYSHA HUSSAIN is a New York-based writer and journalist. Aysha was featured in The New York Times’ “We, Myself and I,” and her work has been published in Newsday and Muslim Girl.
FASTING FOR YOUR HEALTH

By Nadia Malik
While it may not feel like a stride for a healthier body when Muslims brave 16-hour days of no food or water in Ramadan, some are emulating the practice outside of religious edicts as a way to jumpstart weight loss, increase lifespans, and stave off diseases.

Intermittent fasting has become an avenue to decrease calories for a specific period of time—perhaps just the morning, up to 24 hours, or several days—to give the body a chance to regroup. “When your body isn’t focused on digesting, it can focus on other things, like muscle repair, detoxification,” explains Alina Islam, a holistic nutritionist based in Toronto. Depriving yourself for extended periods also helps normalize hunger hormones and cortisol and burn fat, since there are no longer glucose stores for your body to dip into.

Valter Longo, professor of gerontology and biological science at the University of Southern California and director of the USC Longevity Institute, has released several studies on the effects of intermittent fasting. “We’ve known for a long time even simple organisms, when they’re starved, they live longer and healthier,” he says.

Longo’s work originally focused on the benefits to patients who had undergone chemotherapy. He found that extended periods of abstaining from eating helped the chemotherapy kill cancerous cells, protected against immune system damage, and activated stem cells.

His studies on mice that were deprived twice a month for four days show they increase their lifespan and have even reduced the symptoms of multiple sclerosis. He explains that when nutritional intake is limited, cells go into “shielded” mode, where they stop growing and invest more into protecting themselves. They are also killed off and regenerated into healthier cells.

Joel Fuhrman, physician, nutritional researcher, and author of several books, believes that humans, in general, have just been ingesting more than is necessary. After all, societies have experienced periods of time where they have run out of sustenance due to long winters or lack of crops because of inclement weather, he elucidates, and have proven that constant consumption isn’t vital. Excessive feasting raises hormones, he continues, and increases the risk of cancer. “It’s not consistent with our genes to eat. People in America, their diets are so low in nutrients and so excessive in calories, they become food addicts,” he expounds. “They start to feel weak if they’re not getting food.”

The symptoms, such as shaking, then start to resemble withdrawal and promote the false idea that weakness is coming from not eating, he says. “If you take really good care of your health, you don’t feel you have to eat all the time.”

Islam agrees. “People have screwed up the way we eat and the mentality around eating,” she expands.

There are several variations of intermittent fasting that have become popular. Longo’s vision is to have everyone do what he and his researchers call a “fast mimicking diet” of 800 to 900 calories once every three months for an average of five days. They developed the mimicking version with specially tailored ingredients because, while total deprivation from all food leads to many benefits, he doesn’t feel it should be taken on by anyone who isn’t being monitored. The mimicking version has similar effects but can be taken on without close supervision. He will do one himself a couple times a year to lose abdominal fat, which is not just a cosmetic concern for him; the fat collecting in the middle of the body can lead to many diseases.

Fuhrman advises at least a 13-hour window of no consumption overnight, which for him consists of an earlier dinner. He will take a few days out of the year to not eat for a longer time period when he feels he needs a tune up. Others will skip breakfast or have meals within a specific window later in the day. One popular version has been the 5:2 diet, which advocates normal dining habits for five days in a week and then cutting calories to one-quarter that amount for two.

Brad Pilon, author of Eat Stop Eat, will not have any meals for 24 hours at a time during the week. He will still drink water and other liquids but limits himself to items that have no calories. “The first time I tried fasting, I was amazed by the fact that it’s much easier than traditional dieting. I went 24 hours without having to go and find, measure, or count food or calories; it was a very liberating experience,” he explains. He also realized that previously he hadn’t been dining out of hunger; rather, he was eating out of habit. When he recognized that, he fixed a schedule. By limiting himself to 24 hours at a time once or twice a week, abstaining wasn’t a burden.

Many have a fear that they may lose muscle or wreck metabolism because they aren’t ingesting nutrients and protein, but Pilon disavows that notion. Longo agrees that muscle loss is not a concern. However, one issue can be that people binge after staying away from meals for so long. “When you finish your fast, you need to pretend that your fast never happened,” Pilon advises. “No compensa-
tion, no reward, no special way of eating, no special shakes, drinks, or pills. The minute you decide to stop fasting, you need to wipe the fast from your memory and eat the exact way you would normally eat at that specific time of the day.”

Nutritional content outside the deprivation windows is important, too. “Whatever lifestyle eating approach you take, it should be a whole food approach. You can’t just eat what you want,” Islam counsels. Fuhrman uses the G-BOMBS method: greens, beans, onions, mushrooms, berries, and seeds are items he advocates as anti-cancer agents.

Of course, anyone who takes on fasting should do the research and consult a physician about particular health concerns and the method being considered. Longo wants anyone who is intent on no nutritional intake for extended periods to do so at a clinic and be advised by a specialist. Fuhrman warns against anyone nursing a baby from taking on the endeavor and also cautions those with kidney or liver problems, cardiac arrhythmia, or taking certain medicines. Islam also recommends to her clients with adrenal exhaustion—whose adrenal glands are constantly pumping out hormones due to stress and who constantly feel exhausted—that they should focus on correcting that issue before taking on the practice.

However, those with diabetes or who are pre-diabetic can benefit from a decrease in nutritional intake, as it can stabilize blood sugar levels, as long as they are not dependent on medication. “A lot of people have insulin resistance,” says Islam. “When you stop eating throughout the day, you increase your insulin sensitivity. This is good for anyone who is on the cusp of being diabetic.”

While research has gone into the benefits of intermittent fasting, any fitness plan is not going to be one-size-fits-all. “The best thing to do is listen to your body and do intuitive eating when you’re hungry and stop when you’re full,” Islam advises. Plus, it may not be the best effort for someone who does not exercise regularly and is ingesting a solely processed menu. “Sort out your diet and lifestyle habits first,” she says. “When you’re doing a bit more exercise, that’s when you can start considering intermittent fasting.”

And although she warns against using Ramadan as a weight loss program instead of focusing on increasing faith, the tenets of normal consumption are found in the ways of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), as he never ate to the point of gluttony. Many also use the month as a jumping off point for increasing spirituality throughout the year, and it can be used similarly for well-being.
“It’s like what people do with New Year’s or a 10-day cleanse,” Islam expands. “It’s all about what you do after those 10 days. Use Ramadan as that nudge.”

She has written a book about how to sustain a healthy diet during Ramadan so that the prospect of the summer fasts is easier to maintain, with advice such as limiting fried and processed products and increasing protein, fiber, and good fats. Not indulging after iftar (fast-breaking meal) and slowing down to a point where your body tells you it’s full is also a good rule to keep the month under control. However, “I think it’s also important to enjoy the treats that come with Ramadan,” she continues. “You don’t want to take the joy out of the month.”

Plus, unlike in Ramadan, where one of the reasons for deprivation is to empathize with the pain of the poor, Islam would recommend not stopping water intake if doing a fast solely for the sake of health.

If someone takes on the practice regularly, Longo adds, then they will recognize the effects it has and may adopt more healthy eating habits throughout the rest of the year. “If in three months, they’ve had 15 days of fasting, they really have an extended opportunity to understand they don’t need to eat bad food all the time,” he says. “They tend to maybe modify slowly their diet. Besides the effects of the fasting, which last for several months, then they have some behavioral changes.”

NADIA MALIK holds a degree in journalism and is a former reporter for a Chicago-area newspaper. She has written for websites and publications and has also worked for several non-profit organizations.
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When I used to think of barley, I imagined a plain, bland box of cereal. Of course, who in their right mind would choose an ordinary box of barley cereal when there is a plethora of more colorful, fruity, and exciting options? Naturally, we are drawn to foods that are eye-catching, aromatic, and familiar. In the case of barley, it is none of the above.

But what is actually special about barley is that it is a halal food mentioned in the Sunnah (practices) of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]), and it is amazingly full of nutritional value. Certainly in this case, we must not judge a food by its exterior. This reminds me of the forewarning verse, “…perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And God knows, while you know not” (Quran 2:216).

The Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] recommended a meal made from barley, known at the time as talbina, for the ill and heartbroken. He is known as saying, “Talbina relieves pain and helps ease sorrow.” Talbina is made by mixing two spoons of barley with a cup of water or milk, cooked for a few minutes, then mixed with a cup of yogurt and some honey. In a hadith narrated by Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] advised his followers to use barley as a medicine, specifically, as a cure for sadness. It is also narrated that when any one of Aisha’s relatives died, she would gather the women in the family, have a pot of talbina prepared, and then eat it together.

Before Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] died in 632 AD, he left us with ample knowledge to enrich our lives. Today, centuries later, we are still discovering the value of some of his teachings. How could a man from the seventh century teach us what we are now using advanced technology to decipher? Obviously, he was a chosen man from God, sent to humankind to help us follow the right path. One of his pearls of wisdom is the benefit of consuming barley.

Today, we know that it provides us with high fiber, antioxidants, and a range of vitamins and minerals which aid in heart health and diabetes management, among other benefits.
Barley contains nearly thirteen grams of fiber per cooked cup compared to four grams of fiber found in the more common grain, oatmeal.

Montana State University College of Agriculture professors, Rosemary K. Newman and C. Walter Newman, in their book titled *Barley for Food and Health*, discuss a study where a variety of baked products and cereal foods made from either barley or wheat are used to measure their effects on cholesterol levels. Several volunteers consumed these products daily for four weeks. Those who consumed the wheat foods had increases in total and LDL (bad) cholesterol, whereas those who consumed the barley products had lower cholesterol levels. In conclusion of their study, they found that barley, although a plain food, can “…effectively normalize blood cholesterol. β-Glucan, a significant part of the dietary fiber in barley, is the most important component for lowering blood cholesterol concentration.”

Another top benefit of consuming barley is the low sodium versus high fiber content. Barley contains nearly thirteen grams of fiber per cooked cup compared to four grams of fiber found in the more common grain, oatmeal. Fiber, as we know, helps promote regularity and a healthy digestive tract, which in turn helps in weight management. The low sodium in barley helps control blood pressure.

Additionally, barley is a source of protein. Protein is a building block for human muscles, bones, skin, and blood. One cup of cooked barley provides about seven grams of protein. As a component of every human cell, protein is used to build and repair tissue, to formulate enzymes and hormones. Although protein bars and shakes provide supplemental protein, the more natural and healthier way to consume protein can be found directly from barley.

Mary Ann Allen, also known as “The Frugal Chef,” from Dallas, Texas, makes a fast, easy, and inexpensive barley salad. She prepares the barley by boiling it until it becomes slightly tender, then she drains it and lets it cool down. She then chops a few vegetables, which can basically be any vegetables you have on hand, such as celery, bell peppers, tomatoes, scallions, and parsley. Toss all the ingredients together, then dress it with some olive oil, salt, and lemon. There, you have a healthy, halal, and quick lunch with minimal effort. As a hot option, you might also enjoy IFANCA halal-certified J&M Food Products Lamb & Barley Stew.

It is important to note that barley can be found in the market in various forms. The most common, and fastest to cook, is pearl barley. In this form, pearling of the grain takes place. This essentially means that the grain’s outer layers are peeled away in an effort to make the cooking process quicker. This peeling also causes the grain to lose some of its nutritional value, depending on how many layers are peeled away. Hulled barley, on the other hand, retains most of the nutritional value since only the outermost layer is removed. Although this type of barley requires additional cooking time, it makes for a more nutritious meal and is considered to be whole grain.

Islam is a wonderful gift. Through Islam, we not only have guidelines on how to lead our lives, but we also have general measures on what is good and beneficial for us and what is harmful. There are countless beneficial foods and drinks available for our consumption that are both tasty and full of nutrition. One of these foods is barley. Barley is a versatile grain with a deep, nutlike flavor and a pasta-like feel. Although it appears plain at first sight, it contains vital nutrients in each grain, and when paired with meat or vegetables, provides a satisfying, well-rounded meal.

**ASMA JARAD** is a freelance writer from the Chicagoland area. Asma has a bachelor of arts degree in liberal studies from the University of Illinois, and a master of arts degree in English from National University.
L-Cysteine: A Friend to Our Bodies

By Taskeen Khan
I say "calcium," you say "strong bones." I say "vitamin C," you say "cold prevention." I say "L-cysteine," you say "what?" Though unfamiliar to most of us, L-cysteine is a substance our bodies make and use on a daily basis. It is a non-essential amino acid, however, when a person is stressed or physically strained, it becomes increasingly important.

Nevertheless, an interview you are anxious about or stomach bug that just won’t go away are not reasons to start popping L-cysteine supplements. In most cases, it can be adequately synthesized by the body, with most exceptions being individuals affected by metabolic diseases. L-cysteine is like a good friend, you may not think about her every day, but when you need her, she’s there for you.

Just like one has a variety of ways to stay in touch with friends, our body has a variety of pathways to choose from when “keeping us in touch with,” or synthesizing, L-cysteine. According to Livestrong.org, the body can take methionine, an essential amino acid found in our foods, and convert it into L-cysteine. The body’s other option is to take cystine, another compound found in our foods, and turn that directly into L-cysteine. Supplements provide the body with a third method for L-cysteine intake. They contain N-Acetylcysteine, which is in turn converted into L-cysteine.

Now that we know exactly how L-cysteine is made, we are still with the question of why? Well, it turns out there are a variety of purposes for L-cysteine. Often, the body converts the amino acid into glutathione, a powerful antioxidant that can help protect our bodies from free radicals. As described by the National Institutes of Health, “free radicals can be hazardous to the body and damage all major components of cells, including DNA, proteins, and cell membranes.” This damage to DNA is one of the causes of cancer.

If cancer stopping isn’t impressive enough for you, glutathione does much more for the body. According to aminoacidstudies.org, glutathione “inhibits inflammation and leads to an overall strengthening of the immune system.” The antioxidant also stimulates production of leukotriene, which supports macrophages—white blood cells that break down foreign substances in our bodies, such as pathogens, and play a key role in the immune system. Moreover, WebMD states glutathione also helps build and repair body tissues.

Even when not converted into glutathione, L-cysteine is critical to our health. It has detoxification properties, which can help keep dementia and multiple sclerosis at bay since both can be connected to a buildup of toxins that takes place as an individual ages. The amino acid’s cleansing abilities also keep organs healthy and running for longer.

Additionally, L-cysteine helps the body make fatty acids, which are key components of myelin sheaths, the protective coating surrounding nerves like those in the brain and spinal cord. These coverings help prevent environmental damage, and in turn this helps thwart diseases that are associated with the breakdown of the myelin sheaths that cover nerves. Myelin sheaths are also responsible for helping the body send impulses from one end to the other at very high speeds, which is vital to health.

Studies have found that increased levels of L-cysteine can be connected to lower levels of osteoporosis. In addition to these benefits, L-cysteine also has medical uses. Individuals who have acetaminophen poisoning are given treatment that includes L-cysteine.

In order to maintain adequate amounts of L-cysteine in your body, it is essential to eat foods rich with methionine and cystine. People need 1.9 milligrams of L-cysteine per pound of body weight. Dr. Mian Riaz, director of the Food Protein R&D Center at Texas A&M, suggests turning to soybeans, beef, lamb, chicken, fish, sunflowers seeds, oats, cheese, eggs, legumes, and kamut for foods high in cystine. However, it is important to note that cystine is water soluble, so cooking cystine-rich foods in water for too long reduces its concentration.

Sometimes we ingest L-cysteine without even knowing or wanting to; it’s often an ingredient used in packaged bread products (from loaves to buns) as a dough conditioner to produce breads with improved and consistent quality. Whether on an ingredient label or a bottle of supplements, the source of the ingredients is always important. In the case of L-cysteine, Dr. Riaz explains that L-cysteine is “sometimes made from human hair or duck feathers,” which might render it not halal. As for supplements, synthetic supplements that are not made from animal materials are also available. These versions are made from fermenting a nonpathogenic strain of E.coli and are just as easily available as their non-synthetic counterparts. To be sure what you’re consuming is halal, you must always read the labels. If you see “L-cysteine” on the packaging, try to verify it’s from a halal source by contacting the manufacturer, or simply look for the Crescent-M symbol signifying the product is halal. Look for IFANCA halal-certified breads by Kontos Foods in your local grocery store.

**TASKEEN KHAN** currently attends UIUC. She has previously written for *Huffington Post Teen and Islamic Horizons Magazine*. Khan has also won several Silver Keys and honorable mentions in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.
Shaved Asparagus Citrus Salad
By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RDN, LD

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup finely chopped shallots
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 pound asparagus
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, whisk together shallots, lemon juice, mustard, and honey.
2. Remove the root ends of the asparagus (about an inch) and discard.
3. Cut asparagus tips off spears and add to the bowl with shallot mixture.
4. Use a vegetable peeler to shave asparagus spears into thin ribbons; add ribbons to shallot mixture as you go.
5. Add mint and parsley; toss salad until combined.
Curried Red Lentils
By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RDN, LD

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 large carrots, finely chopped
1 rib celery, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons curry powder
6 cups Saffron Road™ Classic Culinary Vegetable Broth
1 1/2 cups dried red lentils, washed and sorted
2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 (15-ounce) can coconut milk
small bunch cilantro, chopped (optional)

DIRECTIONS
1. In a large pot, heat oil over medium heat.
2. Add onion, carrots, and celery; cook until softened, stirring often, about 8 minutes. Add garlic and curry powder; sauté for 2 minutes longer.
3. Stir in broth, lentils, salt, and pepper.
4. Bring to a boil over high heat, then cover pot and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer until lentils are very soft, about 40 minutes.
5. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.
6. Working in batches, puree half of soup in a blender until nearly smooth. Then, return it back to the pot.
7. Stir in coconut milk and reheat gently over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, until warm; do not boil.
8. Ladle into bowls and sprinkle with chopped cilantro just before serving, if desired.
Egg Salad
By: Alia Shalabi

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 8 large hard-boiled eggs
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon yellow mustard
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon paprika

DIRECTIONS

1. Chop up the hard-boiled eggs.
2. Add the remaining ingredients and combine well.
3. Serve on bread, toast, or with crackers. Enjoy! 😋
Spring Smoothie
By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RDN, LD

Servings: 2

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 cups Organic Valley milk
- 1 large banana
- 1 cup fresh mango, sliced
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger, grated
- 1 cup ice
- 1 fresh stalk of mint

**DIRECTIONS**

1. Add all ingredients except mint to a blender and pulse until smooth and creamy.
2. Top with mint before serving.
The Hunt for Healthy Kids’ Meals

By Tayyaba Syed
Hassan Naseem is one of the owners of a Chicago-based restaurant chain that offers Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. After living part of his life in Louisiana, he graduated from DePaul University in Chicago and dove into the halal restaurant business because he recognized the need for healthier, more affordable options.

“We grew up on fish fillets as kids and wanted to provide better options for everyone [else],” recalls Naseem, who helped launch his restaurant back in 2009. At that time, ‘falafel’ and ‘hummus’ were not readily known as mainstream foods like they are now, so the market was open for something new. “It’s been part of our goal to bring healthy yet flavorful alternatives for families, and [we] decided to pursue the Mediterranean food business.”

Since then, the market has expanded quite a bit, but Naseem’s establishment stands as one of the few major chains that offers exclusively halal meats on their menu. Their restaurants also offer smaller portions for kids, which include rice, hummus, and a meat protein like chicken shawarma or kabob, along with milk or juice and pita chips. Sounds like a lot of food; how much does it cost?

“It wasn’t just the lack of foods to eat that was an issue growing up,” says Naseem. “It was also not always affordable to eat out. So, our suburb[an] location has free kids’ meals on weekends. We want families to come out and make us part of their weekend plans. Take a break from cooking and just come enjoy some good, healthy, and affordable food,” he says.

Sanam Shabbir of Westmont, Illinois, loves taking her six-year-old to Middle-Eastern restaurants and appreciates having a healthy, halal option nearby.

“I avoid taking my daughter to fast food places,” says Shabbir, who works part-time as a teacher. “I want her to have fresh, unprocessed foods that are well-prepared and good for her. At Mediterranean restaurants, there’s fresh pita and hummus, which she loves to eat. We usually get grilled chicken shawarma with rice. It’s easy to eat, full of flavor, healthy, and filling.”

For Houston resident and mother of five Afshan Malik, her go-to choice for a healthy and halal eatery is also a Mediterranean option. It gives a nice alternative to the South-Asian or American cuisines she makes at home, and she appreciates the emphasis on fresh foods and meats and the wholesome veggie options available at Mediterranean restaurants.

“There isn’t always a separate menu for kids at Mediterranean restaurants, but the whole family is still able to enjoy the food,” shares Malik, who is a writer and also works as a project manager for a publishing press. “Their food is nutritious and tastes great. Even the rice is super delicious and a favorite of the kids. I think the best part is that they don’t add preservatives, and the food doesn’t flare up my kids’ allergies.”

Nur Syed of Dallas, Texas, knows what it is like to be selective in what she can eat as she had many food sensitivities as a child. Now, as a pre-teen, she avoids certain foods but feels comfortable eating at Mediterranean restaurants.

“I’ve grown aware of what foods trigger my sensitivities and have learned to avoid them,” shares the avid reader and middle schooler. “To make it easy on all of us, we just choose to go to Arab restaurants. I get to easily enjoy the meats and veggies there without worry. My favorite part, though, is being served fresh-baked pita straight out of a clay oven. I’m getting hungry just talking about it,” she giggles.

Another favorite for Shabbir is dining at Italian restaurants as a family. Instead of the usual ‘mac & cheese,’ she looks for places with more variety and flavor.
“It doesn’t have to be an elaborate pasta dish,” Shabbir notes. “My daughter will even enjoy simple noodles with butter or a personal-sized pizza made from scratch; it’s the freshness that matters. I love seeing her eyes light up when the waiter sprinkles fresh cheese over her plate,” she shares.

Aside from Mediterranean and Italian cuisines, some kids simply do want halal versions of staple American fast-foods like burgers and chicken nuggets. For the last four-and-a-half years, Sarwar Ghani and his Illinois family-owned business has been working hard to provide those same foods, but fresh and unprocessed. They have a large selection of kid-friendly foods available at their multiple locations.

“We wanted to be able to cater to millennials and serve good, quality [halal] fast foods,” tells Ghani, a father of two from Wheaton, Illinois. “All our chicken is coated in fresh batter and everything is made-to-order. We want to make eating out a satisfying and fun experience for the whole family and have upgraded our facilities to accommodate large groups. Eating is a communal affair and should always be enjoyable and memorable.”

As a mother of three young boys with very distinct and different tastes in food, Asia Rizvi finds Indian restaurants to be a unanimous favorite choice amongst them.

“Unfortunately, it’s not always the healthiest choice,” admits Rizvi, who is a dress designer living in Wood Dale, Illinois. “It’s hard to find healthy and kid-centered menus in Indian/Pakistani restaurants, and my boys always go for the biryani, nihari, or butter chicken options. I don’t stress about it too much, though. I think once in a while such treats are okay. [The] majority of the time I cook at home, as it is very important to me; but we can all use a break every now and then, right?” she says jokingly.

Saima Ahmed of Schaumburg, Illinois, agrees with Rizvi about the lack of kid-centric menus at Indian restaurants and worries about her kids potentially developing poor eating habits. She too makes a sincere effort to cook healthy meals at home and bring nutritious snacks and groceries into the house for her family. The Chicago native values healthy eating much more now as a mother than she did growing up. She can see the consequences it has had on her as an adult and does not want her three children to go through similar issues as a result of making the wrong food choices.

“I think the toughest thing for me is to resist my sweet tooth, and I find myself being stealth about it around my children. It shouldn’t be like that,” says the kindergarten teacher. “I hope my kids can appreciate good, wholesome food as part of a healthy lifestyle. I haven’t been able to set the best example, but we can all learn from the teachings of our Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. He taught us how to eat, what to eat, and when to eat, and these are practical, timeless and universal examples for us to use even today,” Ahmed says.
Keeping kids’ needs in mind, restaurant-owner Nausheen Fatima of Glendale Heights, Illinois, has designed a menu that caters to all types of eaters at her family-friendly restaurant. It is equipped with a bike that customers can spin to blend their own fresh smoothies, and she is even adding a kids’ corner to the restaurant soon. She opened her restaurant a year ago with the intention of providing not just halal food but pure (tayyab) food as well.

“This is the type of food we are commanded to eat in the Quran,” reminds Fatima, a mother of four. “I have made it my passion and mission to bring such foods to our communities.”

Fatima’s restaurant has had its menu reviewed by nutritionists and doctors, each ingredient carefully analyzed to cater to different dietary needs. They offer organic, vegan, wheat-free, gluten-free, soy-free, and even dairy-free options for those with specific dietary restrictions.

“I want every grown-up and child that enters my restaurant to be able to eat happily and fully, but most importantly, eat healthily,” Fatima says with a smile. “Even children with special needs or serious food allergies can enjoy themselves here.”

If you live in a place where halal and healthy eateries are still limited, try working with smaller restaurants to get them to provide halal meats. There may be meat suppliers available near you, and many grocery stores even offer halal beef and chicken now. Get creative and find options nearby to make eating out with kids easy, healthy, and fun.

TAYYABA SYED is an award-winning author and journalist whose work has been featured on numerous publications including NPR. She recently co-authored her first children’s book. She lives with her husband and three children in Illinois.
Where do you live? Does it affect your health? Does it affect your eating habits? Of course, it does! Many factors play into your lifestyle, including geographical factors. A region’s weather, sunlight amount, air quality, accessibility to outdoor physical activity, and availability of various foods and restaurants all affect your wellbeing.

So how do we fare as a nation on the global stage when it comes to regional health? The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals conducted a Global Burden of Disease Study in which 188 countries were measured using data from surveys, pharmaceutical companies, and medical records. This rubric is used to measure the progress in accordance with the United Nation’s health goals. Iceland and Sweden took the top two slots. So did we make the top 5? Nope. Top 10? Nope. Did we at least make the top 20? Nope. As a first world nation, the United States barely made it in the top 30 at number 28.

I know, I know. You’re thinking this must be a mistake. Appalled? Aghast? Perplexed? Confused? Well if that devastates you, then you may not like what we discuss next. The United States has made the list of top ten most obese countries in the world many times, and has always made it in the top twenty. In fact, the United States has hovered around being number one quite a few times as well (depending upon which source you check).

When thinking about obesity indices, one can readily assume that these can be divided into two categories: rich countries and poor countries. Rich countries have too much gluttony and poor countries do not have enough food for their communities. However, the flipside can also be true at times. A rich country may have healthier options whereas a poor country may only have access to unhealthy food (due to poor agriculture, scarcity, or economic burden).

So if those are the statistics on health, then what do the numbers say about the life expectancy of Americans? According to the most recent global research published by the World Health Organization, the United States seems to be lagging behind in the category of life expectancy. So did we make the top 10? Nope. Did we make the top 20 or the top 30? Nope and nope. We are at number 31. Seriously, I’m just as shocked as you. Compared to other high earning countries, this should not be the case. So why is this happening, especially since we have money, technology, and did I mention money? Well, compared to other high income countries, we also have high maternal and infant mortality, high body mass index, high homicide rates, and wait for it...no universal health coverage. Do you want to know who beat us? Out of the thirty countries ahead of us in regard to life expectancy, here is a look at the top five (both genders combined average age): Japan, Switzerland, Singapore, Australia, and Spain. By the way, our northern neighbor, Canada, beat us also; they ranked 12th.

Ok...breathe. I know that was a lot of research and now you just want to eat donuts and watch infomercials about vacuum-sealing steaks. I decided to talk to a few local Americans who have lived in various climates and countries to compare how their lives and lifestyles have changed. Mishaal Khan has lived in the desert climate of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and has moved to the continental climate of Chicago where four seasons of weather are typical (many times it feels like two: winter and construction). When asked to compare the two regions, Khan says Saudi Arabia was extremely dry and, when combined with the occasional dust storm, it took a toll on his allergies. However, growing up in a warm climate prompted him to be active, and the vast amount of sunlight had a huge positive effect on his overall mood and health. Did geography make a difference in regard to his eating habits? Khan says, “Eventually everyone is inclined to adopt the food habits of where they live, mostly due to availability, price, and trend. For example, it is a conscious effort for me to eat healthy in general in the US because there is a dominant fast food culture here [...]; that does not leave many options for the consumer.”

Growing up in Boston, Massachusetts, Mukarram Mahmood felt the cold weather’s negative effects on his family. His children had to deal with eczema and extremely dry skin in addition to being stuck inside the house. Now, Mahmood and his family live in sunny Arizona. So how has this change been? “Well, the bright sun makes a positive difference in my mood, plus it has lessened my chronic back pain.” A study published in the Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine in 2008 supports Mahmood’s statement, as it concluded that there is a correlation between vitamin D (which comes from the sun) deficiency and chronic back pain. Not only has the
quantity of family time improved for the Mahmood household, but so has the quality. Mahmood continues, “I grew up in a colder climate and we weren’t able to do much as a family. Most of the time was spent in front of a computer or the TV. Now we try to take advantage of the climate and do more outdoor activities with the kids. My wife and I are able to plan outdoor activities almost every weekend!” When asked if climate has made a difference in how they eat as a family, Mahmood’s response is somewhat surprising: “Now we go out to eat more frequently because the children are excited to always go out.”

Ok, so we know that weather plays a large part in lifestyles and eating habits, as do different cultures from the east to the west. What about just moving from Toronto to Chicago? The climate is somewhat similar. The cultures are somewhat similar. The lifestyles are somewhat similar… or are they? Let’s ask two individuals, both of whom were born in Toronto and moved to Chicago after their formative years. What differences did they notice in health habits and lifestyles?

Shazia Siddiqi says, “Growing up in Canada, you see a lot more people out and about, walking outside and using public transportation. It was a part of normal daily activity.” With regard to eating habits, Farhana Khan points out the difference in culture. “People tend to cook more and eat at home in Canada. Many Canadians tend to keep in line with healthier options than Americans, perhaps because there aren’t as many options for unhealthy food. Also, when you do go out to restaurants, the portion sizes are smaller than in the United States.” Siddiqi also mentions that since she has lived in Canada and has traveled to Europe and Australia on business, she’s noticed that very few people are overweight in those countries. “Their attitudes towards fitness and food are different than here [in the United States]. They don’t diet or do intentional exercises as
much. Healthy habits and being active are just a regular part of their lifestyle.”

So there you have it. From analyzing the research on health and longevity to talking to people about how moving from one region to another has affected their lifestyle, we realize that perhaps we need to get educated, get cooking, and get active. Climate, geography, and culture can play a significant part in your health goals. However, the most important factor for a healthy you is you. You can make the decision to be healthy. After all, health is one of the most important blessings we have from God. Let’s not take it for granted.

HUSNA T. GHANI has an MSEd and an MBA. She has taught health and science for years. When she’s not working, she reads, writes, sketches, and tries to save the world (or something like that).

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### HALAL-CERTIFIED PRODUCT LOCATOR

Not all of the company products are halal-certified. Look for the Crescent-M logo on the product label or verify the certification using the Certified Products listing on www.ifanca.org.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Valley</td>
<td>Dairy Products</td>
<td>Cropp Cooperative/Organic Valley</td>
<td>Supermarkets throughout the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beverages / Beverage</td>
<td>POM Wonderful, LLC</td>
<td>Supermarkets throughout the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concentrates</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruits Processed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POM Wonderful</td>
<td>Food Products</td>
<td>American Halal Co., Inc.</td>
<td>Target, Whole Foods, Kroger, Publix, HEB, and various markets throughout the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snack Food</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit their website to locate a store near you: <a href="http://www.saffronroadfood.com">www.saffronroadfood.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appetizers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffron Road</td>
<td>Personal Care Products</td>
<td>Sunrider International</td>
<td>Visit their website for distributors: <a href="http://www.sunrider.com">www.sunrider.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cosmetics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nutritional Supplements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrider</td>
<td>Personal Care Products</td>
<td>Toms of Maine, Inc.</td>
<td>Department stores, supermarkets, and drugstores throughout the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cosmetics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nutritional Supplements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom’s of Maine</td>
<td>Personal Care Products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonderful</td>
<td>Pistachios and Almonds</td>
<td>Paramount Farms</td>
<td>Supermarkets and drugstores throughout the United States</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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www.ifanca.org

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