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Does your daily bread contain human hair, or duck and chicken feathers which are from animals not Halal slaughtered in accordance with the Islamic Shariah Law?

By

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Bread has been referred to as the staff of life, but that was before the advent of modern production techniques. In the early days of milling, flour was produced by crushing the whole grain between stone rollers. Not so today. Flour is milled by discarding the germ and the cellulose outer layer and crushing the grain between high speed steel rollers. Unlike the course ground whole grain flour produced by stone grinding, the flour we eat today is an extremely fine white powder.

There are approximately 60 approved chemicals used in the making of flour and bread. Although no single manufacture uses all 60 additives, eight or more are common place. For example, it is known that gelatine is produced from animal skin and bones and that the rennet used in some cheeses comes from calves stomachs. But did you know that bone char (from cow bones) is still occasionally used to whiten some sugars, include isinglass a substance obtained from the swim bladders of fish?

The possibility that human hair may be used in bread relates to the existence of an animal-based flour additive called L-Cysteine. It is an amino acid which is used as a flour improver. It is known as E920 and is permitted for use in all biscuits, breads and cakes except those that claim to be wholemeal.

The problem for Muslims and vegans is that traditionally L-Cysteine is produced from feathers, pig bristles and sometimes even human hair. These days L-Cysteine can also be produced synthetically but apparently human hair remains one of the richest sources of this amino acid – it makes up about 14% of your hair - and there is a small industry in China making the additive from hair clippings.

Furthermore there's even a published paper written by a Rabbi about whether L-Cysteine from human hair is kosher. Apparently it is – so long as the hair in question was not harvested from dead bodies.

How commonly is L-Cysteine used in bread and biscuits?

The problem with E920 is that even when it is used it doesn't have to be listed in the ingredients that's because it is broken down in the baking process so the manufacturers argue that doesn't constitute an ingredient.

The Food Standards Agency denies this, It says that L-Cysteine must always be labelled. Indeed, the industry says the reason you so rarely see E920 on labels is that these days it is very rarely used (apparently it was much more common fifteen years ago).and that the only L-Cysteine their members would use is the synthetic variety.

However the European regulation specifies that only L-Cysteine produced from duck and chicken feathers or from pig bristles can be used. That means that, so long as your daily bread was baked in Europe, it almost certainly does not include human hair but the question is that not suitable for the Muslim consumer unless duck and chicken feathers are from animals Halal slaughtered in accordance with the Islamic Shariah Law.

Furthermore If British bakers are using synthetic L-Cysteine are they breaking EU guidelines? It is hard to get a straight answer because if L-Cysteine is added when the flour is milled and the millers say it something the bakers would add.

USEFUL LINKS :

<http://www.cspinet.org/reports/chemcuisine.htm>

<http://esvc001429.wic023u.server-web.com/understanding.html>

http://www.iconocast.com/dinner-movie/Food_Additives.htm

<http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:LMUUKCFbpXAJ:extension.usu.edu/files/foodpubs/fn371.pdf+60+approved+chemicals+used+in+the+making+of+flour&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=29&gl=uk>