

Halal Meat Consumer Guide



This is a simple guide to give Halal Meat Consumers a basic understanding of the key issues in relation to halal slaughter & stunning of Lamb, Poultry and Cattle.

The objective is to arm the consumer with enough information to make suitable enquiries, avoid that meat where there is doubt and positively choose that meat which is closest to the Sunnah.

Watch the following **YouTube** clips to better your understanding of Lamb supply chain & slaughter.



A British Halal Lamb Farm-to-Fork infomercial aired on Islam Channel. 14:48 mins.

youtube.com/watch?v=BfrumvIW0Xg



A scientific understanding of Halal Lamb slaughter methods. 9:15 mins.

youtube.com/watch?v=wuFXgM-IBno

The stunning issue

There are 3 key issues with stunning in respect to Halal compliance

- (i) Does the stun kill the animal?
- (ii) Does the stun impede blood loss?
- (iii) Does the stun cause pain to the animal?

There is little scientific evidence to support the assertion that Electric Head-Only Stunning (see below) impedes blood loss and that effective stuns (not mis-stuns) cause pain so we concentrate in this guide on whether the stun kills the animal. For further details on sheep blood loss read online the Meat Science journal article published in 2015 by Googling 'lamb slaughter science' or by going directly to sciedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0309174015300358.

The Islamic Principle

The first point to appreciate is that there are different stunning methods for different animals and these affect the different species in different ways (depending on size & strength etc.).

Some stun methods are **Haram** (as they are known to kill the animal), some are **Halal** (as they are known not to kill the animal) and some are **Doubtful** (where insufficient research has been conducted to ascertain that no animal dies).

Remember the **2 key Qur'anic principles**

- (1) **Everything is Halal except what Allah swt has specifically declared Haram (5:1)**
- (2) **You cannot make Haram what Allah swt has made Halal (and vice-versa) (5:87-88, 6:138-144, 16:116).**

Scholars have generally warned Muslims living in non-Muslim countries and especially in the case of Meat to follow the principle that ‘**All Meat is Haram unless proven Halal**’ (e.g. Mufti Taqi Usmani). Meat is proven Halal if it is not from one of the specified Haram categories, and the other Halal criteria are met. For meat to be Halal the following *critical criteria* must be observed;

- A permissible animal (e.g. sheep, cattle, chicken but not pig)
- Alive at the point of slaughter
- Slaughtered by a Muslim or a Person of the Book (i.e. a practicing Jew or Christian)
- Pronouncing the name of God by saying ‘God is Great’ in Arabic (Tasmiyya, similar to saying Grace at the dinner table).
- Severing the minimum number of vessels (arteries and veins)
- Allowing the blood to pour out (since flowing blood is forbidden as it is in the Old Testament)
- Ensuring no subsequent cross-contamination with non-Halal produce

There are other *recommended criteria* whose absence does not make the meat Haram but when observed the meat is regarded as a superior Halal product which is more desirable in Islam;

- Caring for the animal (compassion and welfare)
- Providing water to the animal before slaughter
- Sharpening the blade to reduce suffering (slaughtering in the best manner)
- Preventing one animal to witness the slaughter of another animal
- Facing Qiblah (Makkah) during slaughter

Further information on slaughter methods can be found on the Halal Consumer website BeHalal: <http://behalal.org/consumer/slaughter-methods-explored/>.

Hafiz Masri outlines the importance and relevance of animal welfare from an Islamic perspective ([Animal Welfare in Islam](#), Revised Ed, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK, 2007). Mufti Taqi Usmani has a book ‘[The Islamic laws of animal slaughter](#)’ translated into English by A.A.Toft and published by White Thread Press, A. Toft, California (2006)

LAMB & CATTLE

<i>Method</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Verdict</i>
TS (Traditional Slaughter)	Slaughter without any form of stunning.	Halal (Gold?)
PCEHOS (Post-Cut Electric Head-Only Stun)	A traditional slaughter is carried out and then an EHOS stun (see below) is applied immediately afterwards. This way, even for the layman, there is no shadow of a doubt that the animal was alive at the point of slaughter. Applying a PCEHOS makes it easier for slaughterhouse operators to shackle the unconscious animal onto the bleeding line as well as alleviating potential welfare concerns.	Halal (Silver?)
EHOS (Electric Head-Only Stun)	Electrical current is applied to the head inducing a grand mal epileptic fit in the animal. The animal recovers within minutes if left alone. No permanent damage is done. There is NO scientific literature and NO incidences in practice where lambs/cattle have died from EHOS. <i>Note: Do not confuse this with Electric Head-to-Back Stunning where a current is intentionally applied to the heart (as well) to give it a heart attack - this is Haram.</i>	Halal (Bronze?)

CBS (Captive Bolt Stun)	A gun is fired at the head of the animal. Instead of a free bullet, a bolt is shot out which either penetrates the skull (Penetrative CBS) or jolts the skull (Non-Penetrative CBS). This causes either skull damage, or brain damage, or death. Death does not occur every time but it is difficult to be guaranteed as a Halal consumer that the slaughterhouse will tag all dead animals and not allow them to be used for Halal consumption.	Haram as some animals will die.
<p><i>General points: Lambs: Nearly all of the lambs <u>stunned for Halal</u> in the UK/Europe will be EHOS and not CBS. All lamb that goes to the Middle East and Saudi Arabia from New Zealand uses EHOS (because New Zealand banned Traditional Slaughter).</i></p> <p>Cattle: 99% of all <u>UK stunned cattle are CBS</u>. So you either demand EHOS Cattle or buy Traditional Slaughter.</p>		

POULTRY

Poultry are shackled live upside-down on the production line. It can be debated whether this is appropriate from an Islamic perspective.

Method	Comments	Verdict
TS (Traditional Slaughter)	Slaughter without any form of stunning.	Halal (Gold?)
WBS (Electric Waterbath Stunning)	<p>The poultry line (with the shackled bird) runs into an electrified water-tub to stun the animal. The birds' head & wings are normally submerged in the electrified water. Problems with this method are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Multiple birds (up to 20) are stunned together in the waterbath so you cannot control the current for each bird (unlike lamb which is stunned one at a time) 2) Birds are much smaller animals with smaller heads & hearts and therefore less current is required for them to die 3) The current travels through the whole bird and not just the head thereby potentially causing a heart-attack (unlike EHOS in lamb) 4) Some birds could drown in the water, especially when there is a line breakdown (which happens frequently in a poultry slaughterhouse). <p>Currently there is insufficient scientific literature to support the idea that no birds die from the stun. What we know is that if low-frequency current (50Hz) is deployed then most birds will definitely die. However if high frequency (>600Hz) is used then, in laboratory conditions, the birds will not die. However this has not been sufficiently tested in commercial environments as there are too many conflicting reports.</p>	<p>Haram if low-freq (50Hz) as most birds will definitely die.</p> <p>Doubtful if at hi-freq (>500Hz) as there is a risk that birds can die and not enough scientific research has been done.</p>
GS (Gas-stunning)	Poultry crates are put into chambers where they are gassed. Some gas mixtures cause death. Some are claimed not to cause death but there is insufficient scientific research done in this field.	Doubtful as not enough science and could cause suffocation which is Haram .

<i>Method</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Verdict</i>
Mechanical Slaughter	<p>This is when there is no Muslim slaughterman performing the Zabiha. A rotating blade cuts the bird instead. There are 2 key problems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Is the Tasmiyya being said on every animal? Theoretically a man could be standing there saying the bismillah but is this being done?? What if the man 'yawns' or goes to the toilet? Some plants operate at slaughtering 3 birds per second! 2) The rotating blade may not cut the right vessels in the right place (3 of the 4 vessels in the neck) as the birds' neck usually twists before it is cut. 	Haram if Tasmiyya is not being said on every bird and the correct type & number of vessels are not cut.
<p><i>Poultry General points:</i></p> <p>Nearly ALL Halal poultry in the UK (>95%) is stunned using WBS. WBS Poultry is much cheaper than Traditional Slaughter as you can process up to 12,000 birds/hr! In conventional abattoirs there is a move away from WBS to GS because of quality and welfare issues associated with WBS. In the UK there are a few Muslim Abattoirs in the Poultry trade but most of the Halal poultry comes from non-Muslim companies who sell the best parts of the carcass (the breast) to supermarkets and the rest to the Halal trade. This dampens the price of Halal poultry and makes it a cost market as opposed to Halal-assured/Quality market.</p> <p>Traditional Slaughter poultry is more expensive but is worth the peace of mind.</p>		

The way forward: Develop a tiered system to facilitate choice - Gold, Silver, Halal?

Some scholars have expressed concerns that if certain stunned meat is permitted as Halal then all Muslims would eat that and there would be no incentive to consume Traditional Slaughtered meat per the Sunnah of the Prophet (sas). These concerns could be addressed by 'tiering' the Halal marketplace in a similar way to how the 'Kosher' and 'Glatt Kosher' tiers have been established in the Jewish market. This can be thought of as creating Gold Halal (or Sunnah Halal) standard, Silver Halal & (mubah basic) Halal tiers (descriptors for illustration only).

The basic Halal tier will only meet the critical criteria for Halal – incorporating all the Fardh and avoiding all Haram. The Gold Halal tier will further incorporate all the Mustahab (Recommended) acts as well as avoiding all the Makru (Disliked) acts and can be seen as that which is closest to the Sunnah of the Prophet (sas). Thus it could incorporate facing the Qibla, the slaughterman reciting extra dua/dhikr, being in Wudu etc. The Silver Halal tier will simply be somewhere in between the two. Over time the precise standards or criteria for each tier can be adapted to the relevant risks.

There are two benefits/objectives of tiering:

- 1) to safeguard the minimum critical criteria for Halal (i.e. protect Haram from entering the Halal market) and
- 2) to facilitate consumer choice and the promotion of that which is closest to the Sunnah.

Giving consumers the choice of Halal tiers will insha'allah drive improvements in halal production overall and allow them to buy on the basis of personal levels of taqwa. In this regard Muslim-majority jurisdictions could take the lead by adopting the Gold Halal tier as THE standard for its imports. Rather than framing discussions on the basis of the 'usual' Halal-Haram argument they should frame it as 'wanting to provide their citizens with the best Halal status as standard'. Muslims in Non-Muslim Jurisdictions will need greater flexibility in catering for different tiers, with education encouraging Muslims to 'move up the tiers' to consume closer to the sunnah.