

Chopping foods into small pieces

Is chopping into small pieces included in the labor of Grinding?

As stated above, the **Rambam** maintains that chopping vegetables into small pieces is prohibited by Torah law as a subcategory of Grinding. His source is a statement of the **Gemara** (74b):

Rav Pappa said: One who chops [*fareim*] beets [*silka*] on Shabbat is liable due to the prohibited labor of Grinding.

The **Rambam** apparently understands that this is referring to chopping the vegetable called *silka*, or beets, into small pieces. **Rashi** explains likewise (ad loc.).

By contrast, **Rabbeinu Hananel** (ad loc.) writes that *fareim* is “a type of crushing, rather than a form of cutting.” This implies that only actual grinding is prohibited by Torah law, not chopping into small pieces. The **Rosh** (7:5) agrees with the explanation of Rabbeinu Hananel and expresses surprise at **Rashi’s** explanation.

Rashi’s explanation that *fareim silka* means chopping vegetables into very small pieces is puzzling. Grinding does not apply to a food item that one chops into very small pieces.

According to the **Rosh**, **chopping foods into small pieces** is not prohibited due to Grinding. The **Korban Netanel** (ad loc. 10) explains that the **Rosh’s** reasoning is in accordance with the opinion of the **Rashba** cited on pp. 977–978: The Torah does not expect a person to eat food only in large pieces. Chopping food is considered part of the process of eating, whereas the Torah prohibited only grinding that is a stage in the preparation of food, not when it is part of the eating itself.²

2. Alternatively, one can explain that according to **Rabbeinu Hananel** and the **Rosh** the labor of Grinding is applicable only when a **new identity** is created. Consequently, the prohibition applies only to full-fledged grinding,

Rashi and Rambam: Chopping into small pieces is prohibited by the Torah

Rabbeinu Hananel and Rosh: It is permitted to chop foods into small pieces

Rambam and Ri:
Only chopping
for the purpose
of cooking is
prohibited

In fact, the statement of the **Rambam** seems to imply that he too limits the prohibition to chopping vegetables into very small pieces. As stated earlier (p. 960), the Rambam (7:5) prohibits chopping vegetables into very small pieces only when this is done in advance of cooking. Likewise, the Rambam later writes (21:18): Chopping a vegetable into very small pieces **in order to cook it** is a subcategory of Grinding, and renders one liable. This implies that one is liable only if the chopping is performed in **preparation for cooking**, not if one cuts up vegetables in order to eat them raw.³ A similar opinion is attributed by the **Ritva** (74b) **to the Ri and the Ramban**:

where one changes the identity of the item or food, e.g., grinding wheat into flour, but not to chopping into small pieces, as the chopped item retains its former identity, and is merely smaller. It is possible that even the **Rambam**, who rules that chopping into very small pieces is prohibited by Torah law, would concede that the definition of the labor is the creation of a new identity, only he contends that an item chopped into very small pieces has a new identity. This has ramifications with regard the definition of “very small pieces,” as will be seen below. One difficulty is that this reasoning apparently applies even to non-foods, whereas the wording of the **Rosh** implies that only chopping foods into small pieces is not included in the prohibition. Perhaps it is only with regard to foods that each piece is not considered to have a new identity, as food can be eaten in a variety of ways. By contrast, with regard to non-foods, chopping them up might be considered a more significant act, which transforms their identity.

3. See also the statement of the **Rambam** later in that same paragraph: “One may cut pumpkins to place before an animal, and an animal carcass to place before the dogs, as **Grinding does not apply to fruit.**” The commentaries struggle to explain the Rambam’s reasoning here (see, e.g., the *Maggid Mishne* ad loc.). It seems that according to the Rambam the prohibition of Grinding does not apply to items that one intends **to eat in their current state** (or to give to his animals), such as fruit, but only those items that one intends **to cook** (see also *Taz* 324:5). If so, the *mishna* (156b) that states that one may cut pumpkins to place before an animal and an animal carcass to place before the dogs is likely the Rambam’s source for his ruling that the labor of Grinding applies only to such items that one will cook. Other limitations on the prohibition of Grinding are perhaps also derived from this *mishna*, as explained below (p. 978 note 1).

“One who chops beets is liable due to Grinding.” The **Ri** explained that [this *halakha* applies specifically] in this [case], as one does not eat [beets] as they are, raw. But with regard to bread and the like, which is fit to be eaten immediately, it is permitted. And our teacher [the Raah] ruled likewise in the name of his great teacher [the Ramban].

In other words, there is no prohibition against chopping into small pieces those foods which are edible in their current form. It is prohibited to cut up only foods that require cooking, and when one does so in order to prepare them for cooking.⁴ This is also the opinion of the **Ramakh** (*Shevitat Asor* 1:3, cited by the *Kesef Mishne*, Shabbat 7:5).

By contrast, the **Rashba** in a **responsum** (4:75) implies that any chopping into small pieces is prohibited due to Grinding, even if the food is edible in its current form and one does not intend to cook it.⁵

With regard to the *halakha*, the **Shulhan Arukh** (321:12) rules in accordance with the opinion of the Rashba, that cutting vegetables very finely is **prohibited by Torah law**:

One who chops vegetables very finely is liable due to Grinding.

The **Shulhan Arukh** writes that chopping vegetables into very small pieces is prohibited by Torah law, without distinguishing between vegetables that require cooking and those that are eaten raw (see also *Mishna Berura* ad loc., 38). He rules in this manner against the lenient opinion of many *Rishonim* (e.g., the **Rambam**

Rashba: Any chopping of food into small pieces is prohibited by Torah law

In practice: One should be stringent, unless there are other reasons for leniency

4. It is possible that according to the *Terumat HaDeshen* even these *Rishonim* were lenient only with regard to items that can be eaten in their whole state, whose cutting is accomplished with one's teeth. But if they cannot be eaten without grinding or chopping, the prohibition of Grinding does apply to them even if they do not require cooking (see p. 998 note 12).

5. Nevertheless, the **Rashba** supplies a different reason for leniency, writing that grinding or chopping **for the purpose of immediate consumption** is not included in the labor (see pp. 977–984).

and the **Ritva**), and despite the fact that some *Rishonim* (such as **Rabbeinu Ḥananel** and the **Rosh**) are lenient with regard to cutting all vegetables. Indeed, the *Arukh HaShulḥan* (321:7) expresses great surprise at this ruling of the *Shulḥan Arukh*.

In light of the above, although it is the custom to be stringent and not chop into very small pieces, this action is certainly less of a halakhic issue than full-fledged grinding, as many *Rishonim* are lenient with regard to such chopping. Therefore, one may chop in this manner when there are additional reasons to be lenient,⁶ e.g., when one cuts vegetables into small pieces **in order to eat them right away**, as will be discussed shortly. Similarly, there are grounds for leniency with regard to the definition of “chopping into very small pieces,” as explained below.

Magen Avraham:
It is permitted to chop food that can be eaten without chopping

Some maintain that the **Rema** issues a more lenient ruling than the *Shulḥan Arukh* concerning cutting up foods. In the context of the statement of the *Shulḥan Arukh* prohibiting chopping into very small pieces, the **Rema** writes (321:12):

It is also prohibited to cut up dried figs or carobs **for the elderly**.

Does the prohibition to cut up dried figs or carobs indeed apply specifically when it is performed for the elderly, as implied by the statement of the **Rema**? The *Magen Avraham* (14) maintains that this is in fact the case:

This implies that to do so for someone who can chew them is permitted.

In other words, the prohibition applies only to cutting up the item for an elderly person that is unable to chew the dried figs or carobs without cutting them up first. If one cuts them for a person who

6. One can add the consideration that even those who prohibit cutting into very small pieces would concede that this action is only a **subcategory**. While generally there is no difference between a primary category and a subcategory, as both are prohibited by Torah law, nevertheless it is possible that when there is an additional adjustment which renders an act even less like the primary category, there is more room to be lenient.

can chew these fruits without their having been cut up, this action is not classified as Grinding. The prohibition of Grinding applies only if the grinding is significant because it renders the food fit for consumption; it does not apply to **items that one can eat in their current form** without grinding.⁷

The *Beur Halakha* (321:12, s.v. *lifnei*) disagrees with the *Magen Avraham*:

In my humble opinion, his statement is not necessarily correct, as [the Rema] mentions “for the elderly” [merely] because this is a common situation, as they are unable to eat unless [the food] is chopped into small pieces, but with regard to items that grow from the ground, the prohibition of Grinding applies regardless. This is also implied by the statement of the Vilna Gaon . . . Know that even according to the *Magen Avraham*, who permits chopping up food for someone who is able to chew it without it being chopped, this applies only to dried figs and carobs, which one does not need to cut up; but concerning chopping vegetables into very small pieces and similar actions . . . this must be performed just before the meal, even according to the opinion [of the *Magen Avraham*].

According to this opinion, there is no difference between items that can be eaten without their being cut up and those that must be cut up before being consumed; the Rema simply cites a common example of a case where one would cut up carobs. Similarly, in the opinion of the *Beur Halakha*, the *Magen Avraham* permits chopping up carobs only because there is no great improvement in cutting them up for a person who can eat them as they are. By contrast, chopping vegetables for a salad is prohibited even according to the *Magen Avraham*, as this activity is significant even for people who are capable of eating the vegetables in their whole state.

7. The status of the activity is defined in accordance with the person for whom it is performed, not people in general. Therefore, although people generally eat carobs as they are and it is permitted to chop up carobs for them, one may not chop them up for elderly people who cannot eat them as they are.

Beur Halakha: It is prohibited to chop food even if it can be eaten without being chopped

Mishna Berura:
The chopped-up
food is prohibited
bediavad

The *Mishna Berura* (321:45) writes in the name of the *Ḥayei Adam* that one should be stringent with regard to vegetables chopped into very small pieces even *bediavad* (after the fact):

It is likely that those who chop onions or radishes into very small pieces an hour or two before the meal are liable to bring a sin-offering, and one may not eat the onions.

In practice: One
may be lenient
bediavad

Yet, it should be noted that the *Mishna Berura* himself writes elsewhere (318:2), citing the *Peri Megadim*, that in any case where there is a dispute among the halakhic authorities, the food is permitted *bediavad*. If so, it should be permitted to eat foods that were chopped into very small pieces, as according to many *Rishonim* (e.g., **Rambam**, **Ritva**, **Rosh**), one may chop them, as stated earlier. The *Leviyat Hen* (63) writes in reference to the stringent ruling of the *Mishna Berura*:

With my apologies, he has gone too far, as the opinion of many *Rishonim* is to permit [chopping the vegetables] even *lekhathila* (*ab initio*) ... Accordingly, although one who chops up onions an hour or more before the meal has certainly acted improperly by following a lenient opinion against the ruling of our master, the *Shulḥan Arukh* ... in any case, one should not prohibit this food from being eaten on Shabbat *bediavad*.

In practice, one may be lenient and eat the chopped vegetables, because many *Rishonim* permit this *lekhathila*, and this is an uncertainty with regard to a prohibition by rabbinic law.

The degree of chopping that is prohibited

What degree of chopping is regarded as chopping in this context? The *Yere'im* (274) writes that he is uncertain with regard to the measure that renders one liable:

Rav Pappa said that one who chops beets on Shabbat is liable due to Grinding ... therefore, one should be careful not to crumble fruit into thin pieces, but I do not know the measure of their thinness or granulation.

The *Beur Halakha* (321:12, s.v. *hameḥatekh*) writes that it is possible that one is liable to bring a sin-offering only if the pieces are very small, but with regard to the basic prohibition, one must be careful not to chop the food even into small pieces.

Several *Aḥaronim* sought to define the concept of “chopping into very small pieces.” The *Berit Olam* (Grinding 20) writes that **the normal, weekday manner of chopping** is classified as “into very small pieces.” Therefore, on Shabbat, one should cut food into pieces larger than one does during the week. A more lenient definition is suggested by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Minḥat Shlomo* 91:13; cited also in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata*, 6, note 5):

Various definitions
provided by the
Aḥaronim

The halakhic authorities have written that one who chops wood on Shabbat into small pieces is liable due to Grinding... According to this, one must say that the reason that it is permitted to cut fruit and vegetables into small pieces that are fit for immediate consumption on Shabbat is that it is still necessary to use one’s teeth to chew them. This differs from chopped wood, which is rendered fit for immediate use without any [further] grinding. It is also for this reason that it is permitted to chop radishes and similar foods into very small pieces, as those pieces still require the grinding of one’s teeth.

According to this opinion, the decisive factor is the **outcome of the action**. One who chops wood is liable even if the resulting pieces are relatively large, as they are fit for use without any additional chopping. By contrast, any food that has been cut but still requires chewing with the teeth before being swallowed is considered “unfit for its function,” and therefore the chopping act is not classified as chopping into very small pieces. If so, “chopping into very small pieces” refers to tiny pieces, almost like actual grinding.⁸

8. See the *Hut Shani* (1:102), who rejects the statement of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach: “The measure of small pieces is not dependent at all on the question of whether, after chopping into very small pieces, it is still necessary to chew [the pieces] with one’s mouth while eating. Grinding is defined as

The key factor: Can one identify the piece?

In my humble opinion, one can suggest a definition that is something of a middle ground between these opinions: Many sources imply that the prohibition of Grinding involves essentially **the creation of a new identity**. Each type of produce has its own status, and likewise each piece of produce has its own identity. When one cuts a fruit or vegetable into small pieces, the pieces lose their independent identity, as they become part of the general mixture of small pieces. Perhaps the definition of “chopping into very small pieces” is that one chops them in such a way that it is difficult to identify the pieces. If so, cutting vegetables into very small pieces for a salad would be considered “chopping into very small pieces,” because it is hard to differentiate between a small cube of cucumber and a small piece of green pepper, or between a chunk of tomato and a small cube of red pepper. But if the salad contains larger pieces than these, although they are still



Chopping into very small pieces, when it is hard to distinguish between the tomatoes and red pepper, is prohibited. However the basic *halakha* is that this is permitted immediately before a meal (see below).

any action that prepares the food for eating (or for other requirements) by cutting it into small pieces, and if one prepares it for eating in the manner that people eat it, in small pieces, this is definitely classified as Grinding.” According to his opinion, although it is true that the prohibition of Grinding applies only if the substance is rendered fit for its function, nevertheless, one’s intention right now is that the food should be **edible** in the form of a salad and the like. The fact that one’s teeth will have to play a part so that the food becomes **fit for swallowing** is immaterial at this time. According to the *Hut Shani* (ad loc., pp. 100–102), the prohibition of Grinding depends on the type of use: When one chops an item in order to use it **in a manner which requires that the item be cut into small pieces**, e.g., one wants to eat a vegetable salad, not each piece on its own, this involves the prohibition of Grinding. By contrast, when the manner of use is identical but one chops it simply because it is easier to eat the food in smaller pieces, such as slices of apple rather than the whole fruit, the prohibition of Grinding does not apply.

small, its preparation does not constitute Grinding. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to prepare even a salad of this kind only just before the meal, so that there will be the additional mitigating factor of chopping for immediate consumption, which will be discussed later.



Chopping into large pieces, when one can distinguish between the tomatoes and red pepper, is permitted.

In any case, slicing vegetables (even if not for immediate consumption) is not prohibited due to Grinding. This conclusion is implied by **Rav Moshe Feinstein** in a responsum (*Iggerot Moshe, Oraḥ Ḥayim 4:74, Toḥen 3*):

It is permitted to slice vegetables

Does the prohibition of Grinding with regard to vegetables apply only when one

cuts them into very small pieces lengthwise and widthwise, like when grinding flour, or even when one cuts only lengthwise or only widthwise, as done with carrots, cucumbers, and tomatoes?

ANSWER: In my humble opinion, it is clear [that there is no prohibition of cutting food into slices]... Were it not so, there would be no limit to this, as it would be prohibited to slice a loaf of bread into small pieces, were it not for the leniency that there is no grinding subsequent to grinding; and [likewise, it would be prohibited to cut] a large fruit such as an apple into three or four pieces. Accordingly, it is clear that with regard to foods, Grinding applies only to chopping into very small pieces, as implied by the wording of the *Shulḥan Arukh* with regard to vegetables.

In other words, if slicing were prohibited, there would be no limit to this prohibition, and one would not be permitted to slice bread due to Grinding, were it not for the leniency of “grinding subsequent to grinding,” a principle that will be discussed below (pp. 1013–1021). Therefore, it is clear that slicing is not considered Grinding at all. In light of this consideration, Rav Feinstein also permits cutting

carrots and cucumbers into **thin strips**. This conclusion is also implied by the statement of **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** cited above: Since one still has to chew these vegetable sticks, this is not prohibited due to Grinding.



Chopping into slices or thick strips is permitted.

Slicing vegetables

IN PRACTICE, it seems that

there is a difference between various forms of cutting. Cutting thin **slices** of vegetables is always permitted.⁹ By contrast, with regard to **strips** of vegetables, one should distinguish between two activities: (1) cutting into **thin, narrow strips**, such as those used in a carrot salad. This is clearly prohibited, as the strips are eaten as **one piece** (this is the opinion of **Rav Elyashiv**, cited by *Orehot Shabbat*, 5, note 12), and (2) cutting **thicker strips** for them to be **eaten individually**. This should be permitted, as it differs significantly from Grinding. In a case where these strips are made into a salad and are eaten in a different manner, it is considered a **new creation**, **as each piece loses its independent identity**¹⁰ and is therefore prohibited due to Grinding. But in a case



Grating into thin slices that are eaten together is prohibited.

9. Although **Rashi** (74b, s.v. *hayav ahat esreh*) writes that one who cuts a reed into two or three parts in order to manufacture a wicker hive is liable due to Grinding, it stands to reason that the level of cutting that is prohibited depends on the function and manner of use of the item in question. **Rav Feinstein** and **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** write likewise.

10. Even when a salad contains many different vegetables, each piece remains a separate entity, provided that its source can be identified. It is only if it is not possible to identify the source that this is considered the creation of a different identity, as explained above. In the case of a salad made up of only a single type of vegetable or fruit, there is no significance to identifying the source of the pieces. In such an instance, the criterion for changing identity is the manner of consumption: Are the pieces eaten together or is each one eaten individually?

where these strips are eaten in the exact same way as the whole vegetable itself, it stands to reason that this is permitted, because the strips, although they are now smaller, maintain their independent identity.

