



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients' and co-workers' views, traditions and actions. While you can use this information as a guide, keep in mind that all people within a culture are **not** the same. Be sure to ask your patients and their families about specific beliefs, practices and customs that may be relevant and important during medical treatment and hospitalization.

When describing the Thai culture, the following information may apply to Thai people visiting from Thailand, first generation Thai-Americans or ensuring generations of Thai-Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all Thai people.



## general information

- ✓ People of Thai culture generally value individualism and Independence.
- ✓ Most Thai people prefer to be addressed by their first names, rather than by their family name.
- ✓ Traditionally, the Thai culture is male-dominant, especially among the older generations.
- ✓ The Thai culture is influenced greatly by Buddhist beliefs, with close to 94% of Thai people practicing Buddhism. The remaining Thai religions are Muslim, Christian and Hindu/Sikh.

## *inter-personal relationships*

### **relationship roles**

- ✓ The male is the head of the household or family.

### **decision-making**

- ✓ The wife in a Thai family has a strong influence in decision-making, in both business and domestic affairs. Generally, the wife manages the money and general household tasks for the family.
- ✓ Family members have an influence on a patient's treatment decisions.

### **personal space**

- ✓ Most Thai people consider the head to be the noblest part of the body. You should avoid touching a Thai person's head, unless medical treatment requires you to do so. If it is necessary, provide a warning and an apology before proceeding.
- ✓ Most Thai people feel it is rude to use your foot to point things out or to touch someone else.

### **gestures**

- ✓ The traditional greeting in Thailand is the "wai": the hands are placed together in a prayer-like position and the head is slightly bowed. This gesture symbolizes "hello," "thank-you," "good-bye," and sometimes "I'm sorry." The higher you hold your hands while performing the "wai," the more respect you are conveying. Never raise your fingertips higher than your face.
- ✓ Do not place your arm over the back of a chair in which a Thai person is sitting, or affectionately pat a Thai person's shoulders or back. Both gestures are viewed as offensive.
- ✓ When walking in front of a Thai person, especially an elderly person, lower your upper body slightly.
- ✓ Thai people generally smile to express joy and happiness, as well as to greet each other.
- ✓ Embraces and other outward displays of affection are not common with most Thai people. Instead, most Thai people communicate with smiles and direct eye contact.

*treatment issues*

**medical treatment**

- Doctors and nurses are greatly respected by Thai people. Treatments and advice given by doctors and nurses are greatly appreciated.

**emotions**

- Generally, if Thai people get upset, they tend to keep their emotions hidden or suppressed.

**responses to pain**

- Most Thai people do not like to complain about pain. Be sure to offer them pain medication repeatedly, so they do not have to ask.

**food**

- In general, Thai people do not have dietary restrictions; however, Thai Muslims cannot eat pork.
- Older generations prefer Thai food to other ethnic foods.
- Thai food is traditionally rather spicy, commonly incorporating a number of spices to bring out its distinctive flavor, including ginger, garlic, chili, pepper, knob khaa, curry paste, nam prik and nam pla.

**death**

- Thai Buddhists view death as an end to the "cycle of rebirth," not merely the end of life. They do not mind discussing death.

**g l o s s a r y**

word	meaning
Sawat-diickhrap (to a man) Sawat-diickha (to a woman)	Hello
Pen yangrai	How are you?
Khawp khun ckhrap (to a man) Khawp khun ckha (to a woman)	Thank you

## important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year's Day	January 1	Marks the beginning of the now year in Western culture; is observed by Thai culture.
Nirvana Day	February 15	Observed by Buddhists, this day commemorates the death of the Buddha.
Songkran Festival (Now Lunar Year)	April 13 - 15	Celebration of the new lunar year in Thailand.
Visakha Puja Cwisakha Bucha (Full Moon)	Date varies, usually in May	Commemorates Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away. Falls on the 15th day of the waxing moon in the 6th lunar month.
Hanamatsuri Day (Buddha Day)	April 8	Observed by Buddhists, this day celebrates the birth of Buddha.
King Bhumibol Adulyade's birthday	December 5	Observes the birthday of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Thailand's King.

### Sources

<http://www.thaifocus.com.html>.

*Conversations with Wan Saowalak, University of Chicago Hospitals.*