

# African American Culture



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients' and coworkers' 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 African-American culture, the following information could apply to African-Americans from all of the states, as well as some African-Americans living outside of the United States. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all people of African-American descent.



## general information

- ▼ Most African-Americans are Christians of various denominations, such as Episcopal and Methodist or a combination of the two. They are also Baptist, Lutheran and Catholics as well as a number of Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses.
- ▼ African-Americans are a mainstay in the American entertainment culture in such fields as professional sports, cinema, journalism and music.
- ▼ You should address the patient in a courteous manner. All people, without regard to culture, race, gender and disability, want to be treated with respect and courtesy.
- ▼ Although most African-Americans were born in the United States, a sizable number have come from such African countries like: Nigeria, and Zaire/Congo.

*inter-personal relationships*

**relationship roles**

- ✓ Religion and extended family are traditionally very important among African-Americans. Births and deaths are celebrated, expressing a reverence for life.
- ✓ Social and family orientations vary within the African-American community. Among the middle class, strong male-oriented family traditions prevail, but in many less affluent communities single parent families, usually female head of households, are the norm.

**decision-making**

- ✓ It is important to involve the entire African-American family in treatment decisions.
- ✓ Families may consult with each other when making decisions, to decide what would be best for the patient. Either the patient, or the head of the family usually speaks to the doctor.

**conflict resolution**

- ✓ In general, African-Americans are assertive.
- ✓ Religion generally does not play a role in resolving conflict about health matters. Generally, African-Americans listen to the physician.
- ✓ In case of a disagreement, it may be advisable to bring in an unbiased third party or back up your position with a publication.

**personal space**

- ✓ Many African-Americans are outspoken, and friendly from the first moment of the meeting.
- ✓ Personal touch and shows of affection are usually reserved for close family and friends.

**gestures**

- ✓ A firm handshake and direct eye contact is the standard greeting.
- ✓ Many African-Americans become uncomfortable with a long period of silence.
- ✓ Direct eye contact is very important.

**immigrant african-americans**

- ✓ Immigrant African-Americans vary just as much as the native African-American.
- ✓ Many sub-Saharan Africans immigrate to the United States to better themselves economically and for the sake of education.
- ✓ The most recent wave of African immigration took place during the sixties and seventies, when a number of Africa's best and brightest student moved to the US as a part of the so called "brain drain."
- ✓ Almost all African-Americans, even those from abroad, speak English.

*treatment issues*

**medical treatment**

- ✓ Older patients are more likely to be afraid of doctors and hospitals. They may deny being ill. In these situations, it may be beneficial to speak with a family member or friend who the patient trusts, so he/she can speak with the patient.
- ✓ African-American patients want you to share the information about their well being, regardless of whether it's good or bad news.
- ✓ African-American patients like visitors and want to be attended to.

**emotions**

- ✓ In general, African-Americans openly express their emotions.
- ✓ African-Americans tend to be congenial and easy-going.

**food**

- ✓ During holidays and celebrations, the preparation and eating of food is important. Aside from the usual turkey, ham, chicken, greens, roots, herbs, barbecue and drink at Thanksgiving and Christmas, many families indulge in Chitterlings, which derive from the plantations in the South.
- ✓ There are no dietary restrictions, aside from religions, such as Islamic, which does not accept pork or alcohol.
- ✓ Many African-American meals are made up of rice, beans, assorted vegetables, fruits, and meats. These foods, prepared into delicious dishes, are served at special occasions such as weddings, graduations, anniversaries, picnics, and other social and cultural events.

*did you know*



- ▲ One-third of African-Americans in Chicago live at or below the poverty line.
- ▲ The first permanent settler in Chicago was a black man from Haiti by the name of Jean-Baptiste Pointe DuSable, who was a trader here in 1774.

**death**

- ✓ Patients may want to receive communion or call a priest or a minister. Ask the patient or his/her family as to their religious preference.
- ✓ Family and friends may wish to be present as a patient is dying.

## important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year	January 1	Marks the first day of the New Year.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday	3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday of January	Celebrates MLK's contributions to the civil rights movement.
Easter	Varies '99 April 4 '00 April 23 '01 April 15	Celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Thanksgiving	4th Thursday of November	A Celebration of what we are thankful for.
Kwanzaa	December 26 - January 1	A week-long celebration that focuses on the development and strengthening of the African-American family, community and culture.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

### Sources

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