



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 Mexican culture, the following information could apply to Mexicans visiting from Mexico, first generation of Mexican-Americans, or ensuing generation of Mexican-Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all Mexican-Americans.



## general information

- ✓ You should formally address the patients and family members, especially adults (i.e., Mr./Mrs. or Señor/Señora) and keep the dialogue serious and direct.
- ✓ Family is an integral part of the Mexican-American culture. Patients might want to have their families present 24 hours a day.
- ✓ The majority of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are Roman Catholic, but a number have converted to Protestantism, particularly evangelical Protestantism.
- ✓ Many Mexicans, particularly older patients, may bring in objects of religious meaning, such as sacred pictures, rosaries or a prayer book. Such objects should be left where they are, unless specifically requested by the patient.

## *inter-personal relationships*

### **relationship roles**

- ✓ Traditionally the Mexican culture is male-dominated, although in subsequent generation, it tends to change to the American egalitarian structure.
- ✓ Some male patients may be uncomfortable around female doctors and nurses.

### **decision-making**

- ✓ It is important to involve the whole Mexican family in all aspects of any major decision regarding the patient's health.
- ✓ Family members, although usually adults, consult among themselves the actions and the consequences before reaching a decision.

### **conflict resolution**

- ✓ Mexicans are assertive and fairly demonstrative when expressing emotions.
- ✓ Religion does not usually play a role when determining what is best for a patient.
- ✓ As with many other cultures, if there is disagreement, it may be necessary to bring in an unbiased third party, or to back up your position with a publication.

### **gestures**

- ✓ A warm, somewhat soft handshake is the customary greeting among both men and women. Men should let the woman make the first move toward handshaking. After the

second or third meeting, Mexican men may begin with or add the abrazo, the embrace along with a few pats on the back.

- ✓ Women friends will embrace lightly and pretend to kiss a cheek. In some areas of Mexico, you may encounter an unusual addition to the handshake where, after gripping the palm, the two people slide their hands upward to grasp each other's thumbs.
- ✓ Many Mexicans are 'touch oriented.' This means they may linger over a handshake, they may touch the forearm or elbow, or they may even casually finger the lapel of the other person's suit. All these touches merely signify a willingness to be friendly, nothing more.
- ✓ If a man stands with his hands on his hips, it suggests hostility.
- ✓ Deference is shown to the elderly, so give way to them in public and don't object if they are waited on first.
- ✓ Never visit churches or religious sites while wearing short touch the forearm or elbow, shorts, tank tops, or cut-off shirts or shorts.
- ✓ Patience is important; avoid showing anger if and when you encounter delays or interruptions.

*t r e a t m e n t   i s s u e s*

**medical treatment**

- ✓ The doctor is seen as an authority figure; therefore he/she should give the family any bad news.
- ✓ Any bad news should be relayed to the patient and his/her family.
- ✓ Some older patients can be afraid of doctors and hospitals. In these situations it may be beneficial to contact a close relative or someone that the person trusts.
- ✓ Mexican patients like to know the truth about their condition.

**emotions**

- ✓ Most Mexicans freely express emotions.
- ✓ Mexicans tend to have a happy and congenial attitude, although they can be somber about sickness or death.

**food**

- ✓ Tacos and enchiladas in various configurations represent regional variations and tastes and are common national foods, along with huevos rancheros (a spicy egg dish), and various spice combinations that make up regional molé sauces.
- ✓ Salsas - green and red - are relishes that use the native chiles of Mexico in combination with onions and tomatoes. They have become so popular, that they have replaced catsup as the most frequently requested condiment.

- ✓ Along with chiles, native maize (corn) is a staple in almost all Mexican cooking and can be used in soups, tacos and tortillas.
- ✓ Food is part of any holiday celebration; making it fulfills the value of family and community that is so much a part of Mexican life.

**death**

- ✓ Most Mexican patients would want to receive communion before death. You should ask the patient's family for directions if death is imminent. Usually, a patient also inquires about a priest.
- ✓ Most patients would like to have their families present as he/she is dying. Usually death is followed by somber silence and crying, and the family should not be disturbed.
- ✓ There are no special customs regarding amputations, cremations, or transplants. Most Roman Catholics, however, disapprove of cremation because of a religious sentiment.

did you know



- ? After the 1910 Mexican Revolution began, Mexicans first found their way to Illinois in large numbers, mainly as factory replacement workers for European immigrants during World War I and after.
- ? More than 70% of foreign born Mexicans have, until recently, remained non-citizen, thinking that they would return to their homeland. The trends are changing, however, with almost 100,000 Mexicans expected to take advantage of an amnesty and become US citizens in the next few years.
- ? From the first, Mexican immigrants have sent much money back to relatives. Postal money orders were an important part to the Mexican economy in the 1920's and even today are a significant contributions to the gross national product of Mexico.
- ? The official name of Mexico is United Mexican States. There are 31 states in Mexico.

g l o s s a r y word	meaning
Si	Yes
No	No
Gracias	Thank you
De nada	You're welcome
Por favor	Please
Dispenseme, Perdome Usted	Excuse me
Hola	Hello
Adios	Good bye
Como se llama?	What's your name?
bien	Good
mal	Bad
la madre	Mother
el padre	Father
mucho	A lot
el agua	Water

## important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year's Day	January 1	Marks the first day of the New Year
Epithany	January 6	Celebrates the coming of the three Wisemen and Jesus' revelation to the world.
Anniversary of the Constitution	February 5	Commemorates the ratification of the Mexican Constitution.
BenitoJuarez Day	March 21	Celebrates an important Mexican leader and president.
Easter	April 4 '99 April 23 '00 April 15 '01	Celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Labor Day	May 1	Celebrates the work and accomplishments of the working people
Cinco de Mayo	May 5	Commemorates the victory of the Mexican army over the French in the battle oPuebla.
Mothers' Day	May 10	Celebrates the contributions of all mothers.
Independence Day	September 16	Marks the anniversary of Mexican Independence from Spain.
Columbus Day/ Dia de laRaza	October 12	Marks the anniversary of the discovery America.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

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◆ Sources

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