

Middle Eastern Culture



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients and coworker's 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 Mid-eastern culture ,the following information could apply to residents of the Mideast visiting from the Mideast, first generation Mid-eastern Americans, or ensuing generations of Mid-eastern Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all people from the Mideast.



general information

- Most people of the Middle East are Muslim, from either the Sunnite or Shiite branch of Islam. There are also some Protestants, Christians, Jewish, and Orthodox Christians living throughout the land.

inter-personal relationships

relationship roles

- ✓ Traditionally, and even to a large degree now in some Mid-eastern cultures, the dominant gender is male.
- ✓ In some strict Islamic countries such as Iran or Libya the genders are segregated. A variety of such Mid-eastern customs continue among the Mid-eastern-American population, and the traditions should be respected.
- ✓ People from Mid-eastern cultures are very loyal to both friends and authorities.
- ✓ The Muslim tradition of writing a marriage contract and adhering to a formal engagement process is still alive in the United States. Some marriages are arranged, some are not; either way, the family plays a big role in a young person's marriage.

decision-making

- ✓ Decisions are usually relegated towards the older, more knowledgeable members of the family.
- ✓ As in many other hierarchical, male-dominated cultures the Mid-eastern, it is usually the oldest male who speaks upon reaching a decision.

conflict resolution

- ✓ In general Mideasteners are assertive.
- ✓ Religion plays a vital role in the lives of many Mideasteners. Muslims pray five times a day. When dealing with a health matter, however, generally the patients listen to the physician.
- ✓ In case of a disagreement, use an impartial third party or a publication to back up your claims. To prevent any ongoing bitterness, a sincere apology may ease any tension.

personal and cultural traditions

- ✓ People from the Mideast encourage preservation of their language, folklore and social etiquette (hospitality, generosity and helping neighbors). There is a strong obligation to maintain close extended-family ties to cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents.
- ✓ Elders are respected and cared for by family members. Nursing homes are unheard of for many Mid-eastern cultures.
- ✓ Social visits are frequent on all occasions, not just holidays. Storytelling and the oral tradition is very important.
- ✓ There is a wealth of diversity among the Mid-eastern cultures, and not all adhere to a set format. Do not hesitate to ask, for most people are happy to share their cultural heritage.

gestures

- ✓ When you shake hands with a child, you show respect for the parents.
- ✓ Men and women rarely show public displays of affection.
- ✓ "Thumbs up" gesture has a vulgar connotation.
- ✓ To signal "no" move your head up and back sharply, to signal "yes" dip your head down, with a slight turn.
- ✓ Try not to blow your nose in public. Also don't slouch in your chair or stretch your legs out in front of you. In many Arab countries it is considered impolite to show the soles of your shoes to others.

treatment issues

medical treatment

- ✓ The doctor is seen as an authority figure, and he/she should be the one to deliver any news regarding the patient.
- ✓ It may be beneficial to speak to a family member, when dealing with an older patient.
- ✓ Mid-easterners like to have a clear view of a situation. They want any information to be shared with them.
- ✓ People from the Mideast like to be attended to; they are usually easy-going and humorous.

emotions

- ✓ Emotional responses vary greatly within Mid-eastern cultures.
- ✓ Patients from the Mideast tend to be congenial, but can be somber when dealing with sickness or death.

food

- ✓ The Qu'ran requires that Muslims refrain from eating pork and drinking alcohol. Mid-eastern Christians do not have these restrictions.
- ✓ During Ramadan, the month of fasting (see the Observances Page), Muslims abstain from all food and drink during the hours of daylight.
- ✓ Special occasions are often celebrated by eating Mansaf, a goat or lamb served over rice with a yogurt sauce. Stuffed squash and rice with almonds are also popular.
- ✓ Spices like allspice, cumin and cardamon are commonly used.

death

- ✓ When Muslims die, many are not buried in coffins. Their bodies are washed, wrapped in a shroud and buried immediately.
- ✓ A person's death is followed by forty days of mourning, and on the 40th day there is a remembrance ceremony.

did you know



Islam is not totally divorced from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Not all Mid-eastern people are Muslim. In fact, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are all Abrahamic faiths. The Qu'ran, the sacred Muslim writings, accept the revelations of Judaism and Christianity, which are seen as cousin religions. About 15% of the Mid-eastern population is not Muslim. The largest of such groups include Israelite Jews and Christian Assyrians.

g l o s s a r y

word	meaning
Shokran	Thank you
Ahalan	Hello
Om	Mother
Ab	Father
na'am	Yes
laa	No
Ma'a	Water
Alla EIRahib wa EISaa	You're welcome
Kathir	A lot
Ann Eazinak	Excuse me
Kaifa Halok	How are you?
Ma Ismok	What is your name?
Taib/Bikair	Good
Saia/Mosh Bikair	Bad

important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year	January 1	Marks the first day of the New Year.
Islamic New Year	Varies mid April - mid May '99 April 18 '00 April 6	Marks a New Year based on the lunar Islamic Calendar.
Prophet's Birthday	Varies '99 June 26 '00 June 15	Commemorates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.
Start of the month of Ramadan (not a holiday)	Varies '99 December 9 '00 November 27 '01 November 17	Start of the month of fasting.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

Sources

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