



**Guide for Providers**

# Diabetes and Cultural Foods

This guide is intended to help healthcare providers better understand cultural group characteristics, and how to approach talking about nutrition (with diabetes as the focal point) using cross-cultural communication. The generalized comments in this guide will not apply to everyone, as there is never a single person who represents an entire group or culture. These guidelines are no substitute for facilitating a meaningful conversation, asking open-ended questions, or a full nutrition intervention. Get to know your patients, their diet, nutrition practices and health belief system by acknowledging each patient’s beliefs as they express them. Inquire about their typical meal schedules and concerns about foods and diabetes management.

## Hispanic / Latino

There are Hispanics/Latinos from many different countries, backgrounds, and levels of acculturation. Classification based on language may lead to incorrect assumptions. A person from Spain, Argentina, Mexico or Puerto Rico will all speak Spanish but the cuisines and eating habits will be very different.

Beliefs and Practices	Dietary Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Value family and personal relationships; mothers are central to the family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Approach healthy eating as good for the whole family</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Religion and faith are of importance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Suggest smaller meals at regular intervals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Health seen as a reward, and illness as inevitable especially when it “runs in the family” or is hereditary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid forbidding high carb foods such as tortillas and rice; discuss reducing portion sizes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Traditional healers are commonly used as well as home and herbal remedies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Choose low-fat and high fiber alternatives, such as non-starchy vegetables</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Respect for health professionals may lead to say “yes” even when not in agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reduce sodium intake, such as salted hot sauces</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Testimonials and peer advice are taken seriously</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage healthier ways of preparing traditional foods such as boiling beans</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Eat two large main meals a day with a small but carb heavy breakfast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Switch to canola, avocado or olive oil and limit fried foods</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Most meals are high carb and high fat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage lower carb breakfast options</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Limit sugar-sweetened beverages</li> </ul>



## Black / African American

Black/African American culture is diverse just like any other culture. A person may consider themselves Black but have different ethnicities, backgrounds and languages. People from Haiti, an African country, or an Afro-Latino will differ on how they perceive health and their eating habits.

Beliefs and Practices	Dietary Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family support is central; women are central to the family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid fried foods and use more baked, sautéed or oven fried food</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Religion and faith are of importance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reduce sodium intake (e.g. gravies and sauces)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Health and illness related to outside influences such as the social and physical environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Choose low-fat alternatives, such as green leafy vegetables prepared in healthier ways</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There may be distrust of medical professions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Limit sugar-sweetened beverages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One main person is in charge of meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Switch to canola, safflower, avocado or olive oil</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ High fat, high sodium meals are common</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include the person in charge of meals in the conversation about nutrition</li> </ul>

## Middle Eastern

The Middle East is a geographical and cultural region located primarily in western Asia, but also in parts of northern Africa and southeastern Europe. Food practices may change quickly with level of acculturation.

Beliefs and Practices	Dietary Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family meals and home cooked meals prepared from scratch are central to everyday life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage portion control of carbohydrate heavy foods and protein sources such as red meat</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Women are mainly responsible for cooking. Buying food may be a shared responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Promote fresh vegetables and herbs for flavor such as mint, basil, green onion, scallions, onion, tarragon, garlic and dill</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Some foods (e.g., pork) may not be consumed due to religious practices. Kosher foods conform to traditional Jewish laws, while a Halal diet reflects foods permissible under Islamic religious laws.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To help with satiety, encourage salads such as shirazi salad and tabbouleh and combining nuts like walnuts and almonds with fruit/dry fruit</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Diet typically contains vegetables, fruit, nuts, dairy, olive oil, olives, honey, chickpeas and rice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support the similarities with Mediterranean way of eating, such as the use of legumes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Meat intake may be high</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use canola oil or olive oil in place of butter</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Foods tend to be aromatic with plenty of spices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Choose low-fat or fat-free plain yogurt</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Health is considered important as it allows one to work efficiently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Switch to smaller portions of whole wheat pita and lavash bread</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Diet is similar to Mediterranean Diet</li> </ul>	



## Asian

There are almost 50 countries in Asia, all with very diverse foods and cultural practices. Trying the great variety of Asian cuisines such as Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Pilipino or Vietnamese is a great way to start understanding the differences and similarities in dietary practices.

Beliefs and Practices	Dietary Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Often live with extended family; there may be a family structure that leans patriarchal</li> <li>○ Great respect for ancestors and family</li> <li>○ Healthy body as a result of taking care of it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage portion control of carbohydrate-containing foods such as rice and noodles</li> <li>○ Use canola, safflower, or olive oil</li> <li>○ Reduce sodium/MSG intake like fish sauce, soy sauce, fermented products, etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Good health influenced by proper balance and harmony, both internally and externally</li> <li>○ May believe in Yin (cold) foods (generally bitter, salty, and sour) as cooling and moistening foods and Yang (warm) foods (generally sweet and pungent) to warm, dry or provide heat to the body.</li> <li>○ Consider some foods as healing such as goji berries, lotus, jujube, ginger, cinnamon, garlic, liver, and other organ meats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Promote maintaining a plant-based diet with plenty of vegetables</li> <li>○ Support the practice of using meats in small amounts mostly to add flavor</li> <li>○ Limit deep fried foods</li> <li>○ Discuss the balance of physical activity and food intake</li> </ul>

The Health Education department at L.A. Care has Registered Dietitians who can provide comprehensive telephonic and virtual nutrition consults upon referral. To refer L.A. Care members for nutrition consultation on common conditions and other services, please find our Medical Nutrition Therapy Referral Form, Health Education Referral Form and the Medically Tailored Meals Referral Form here:

<https://www.lacare.org/providers/provider-resources/forms-manuals>

**The Office of Minority Health has online libraries/resources on various minority health topics. To learn more, visit:**

<https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/>

