

MEXICANS



Researched By:

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Mexicans

I. Description of Culture

A. History

- There is evidence of human existence in Mexico since 20,000 BC
- Early communities were thought to have migrated into “The New World” from Asia by crossing a former land bridge in the Bering Strait. These early societies focused on agriculture and hunting and gathering.
- Beginning roughly around 2000 BC, Mexican history has been divided into five periods: the Pre-classic, or Formative Period (2000 BC-300 AD); the Classic Period (300-900 AD); the Post-classic Period (900-1521 AD); the Colonial Period (1521-1821 AD); and the Modern Period (1821 AD-present)
- Throughout these periods, several predominant civilizations that significantly influenced Mexican culture include the Olmecs, the Teotihuacans, the Zapotecs, the Mayans, and the Aztecs
- In 1521, the Spanish conquistadors conquered the Aztecs and took over their empire, including Tenochtitlan, or current-day Mexico City
- When the Europeans arrived, racial mixing became common and a new people emerged, the *mestizos*. “*Mestizo*” means a person of mixed blood, especially of European and American Indian mix. Mestizos have been the dominant racial group for the past four centuries, accounting for at least half of the total population.
- In 1836, Texas declared independence from Mexico and war began between the US and Mexico. In 1847, Mexico lost part of its territory, including CA, AZ, NM, and TX.
- Political stability and economic and social development that occurred in the first half of the 20th century has allowed Mexico to move from an agricultural economy to an important industrial economy

B. Demographics in Maine

- According to the 2002 Census, there were 37.4 million Hispanics in the civilian, noninstitutional population in the United States, representing 13.3% of the total population. Of those people grouped under “Hispanics,” Mexican made up 66.9%. (Note: “Hispanic” refers to a person of Latin American descent living in the US, including Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans, and sometimes Central & South Americans)
- According to the 2000 Census, there were about 9,360 Hispanics in Maine, accounting for approximately 7.3% of the total population
- Mexicans are more likely to reside in the western and southern portions of the US, rather than in the northeast
- Portland and South Portland combined house the largest community of Mexicans
- Smaller Mexican communities can be found in other large cities including Bangor, Bath, Biddeford, Brunswick, and Lewiston

C. Religion

- The ancient Aztecs and Mayans cherished religion, building huge temples and making human sacrifices
- The Conquistadors brought Catholicism in the 1500s
- There is no official religion in Mexico, probably because of the distinct separation of church and state; however, between 90-95% of the population practices Roman Catholicism
- The Virgin of Guadalupe is the nation's patron saint and is a powerful symbol and model for Mexican women

D. Food

- A tremendous amount of effort goes into the preparation and eating of food
- Mexican food is colorful and flavorful as well as diverse, incorporating traditional Indian flavors blended with Spanish influence
- In general, diets have been continuously improving since the 1930s
- Tortillas are the most popular food. They are made of dried corn kernels in a mild lime solution, ground to a paste, then hand-patted into thin sheets, and baked on a metal sheet. They can be eaten like bread or used in a variety of ways:
 - tacos: tortilla filled with chopped meat, then rolled and fried
 - tamales: prepared like tacos, but placed in corn husks or banana leaves and steamed
 - enchiladas: tacos covered with chili sauce and sprinkled with grated cheese
- Corn and beans are basic food staples
 - Corn constituted over 3/4 of all grain consumed in 1970. Half of all Mexican farmland is devoted to corn. Without corn, half of the country's population would be starving.
 - Beans supply carbohydrates and are the main source of protein for those who cannot afford meats
- Because meat is expensive, Mexicans are not hardy meat-eaters, but they may indulge on holidays
- Fish is also not too widely consumed, although both freshwater and saltwater varieties are available
- Mexicans have a comparatively low egg and milk intake compared to the US
- Mexicans have a low vegetable intake compared to the US, but a high intake compared to Latin American countries
 - Squash family vegetables, onions, garlic, and chili peppers are important
 - Tomatoes are believed to have originated in Mexico
 - Green vegetables are primarily used in stews, soups, and dressings rather than eaten independently
 - Fruits include pears, peaches, pineapples, mangoes, and zapotes (the fruit of the tree that produces chicle for chewing gum)

- Sugar is inexpensive and Mexico is one of Latin America's heavier consumers
- The main meal is eaten at mid-day, probably because it was traditionally thought that in the high elevations of Central Mexico food digests slowly and heavy evening meals resulted in poor sleep

E. Holidays/ Celebrations

- January 1st: *Ano Nuevo* (New Year's Day)
- February 5th: *Dia de la Constitucion* (commemorates Mexico's constitution)
- February 24th: Flag Day (honors the Mexican flag)
- May 1st: *Primero de Mayo* (equivalent to the US's Labor Day)
- May 5th: *Cinco de Mayo* (honors the Mexican victory over the French army at The Battle of Puebla in 1862, a battle that started over a debt that Mexico owed France for post-war rebuilding)
- September 16th: Mexican Independence Day
- November 1st/2nd: *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) Dead relatives are allowed to return to the mortal world for two days and visit their loved ones. Gravestones are decorated, food prepared, skull-shaped candies made, papier-mache skeletons made, and candles lit
- November 20th: Mexican Revolution Day
- December 25th: *Navidad* (Christmas)

F. Clothing

- Urban clothing styles resemble those worn by men and women in European and North American cities
- Rural styles reflect stereotyped countrymen and women. Men wear wide sombrero hats, pajama-like shirts, and blue jeans or chino pants. Women wear *huipil* tunics, embroidered blouses, and *rebozo* shawls.
- Men who migrate to the urban cities from more rural areas tend to adjust to the change in dress more quickly than women, who may continue to wear their rural clothing for awhile
- After World War II, the factory production of shoes increased and a 1970s footwear survey conducted as part of the census revealed that 80% of the population wore shoes, 13% wore *hauaraches* (a traditional type of sandal), and 7% went barefoot
- Factory produced materials are on the rise for both men and women; however, cotton and wool are still spun by hand in rural, Indian-predominant areas

II. Family/ Relationships/ Roles

A. Family

- There are three types of marriages among Mexicans: civil (the only one that is recognized by the state); religious; and free union (occurs when a man and woman cohabit)
- Divorce is rare, probably because of the Catholic influence and the cultural norms favoring traditional marriage; however, divorce is on the rise

- Mexicans value family considerations over individual or community needs
- Common for several family units to live in close proximity of each other and there is a strong day to day reliance on family
- Older children often have more responsibility for their younger siblings and relatives
- There are an increasing number of women working outside of the home, but homemaking and child rearing is still the expected role
- Publicly, women are expected to be respectful and even submissive to their husbands
- Privately, some women may hold a greater degree of power
- Family involvement in health care is common and health care providers are strongly advised to encourage such involvement and to include the family as a resource
- Health care providers should understand and comply with patient and family gender roles

B. Gender Roles

- Gender roles are seen as important to the sense of culture and will likely be followed, at least in public
- Women's Roles:
 - Women are the primary force keeping the family together through work and cultural wisdom
 - Women are the primary caregivers and are responsible for the majority of parenting
 - Women are idealized in some respects and oppressed in others
- Men's Roles:
 - "*Machismo*" or macho attitude is a defined sense of honor that is vital to sense of self, self esteem, and manhood
 - Men are expected to provide for and be in charge of their families
 - The father, or the oldest male, holds the greatest power in most families and may make health decisions for others in the family

III. Communication

A. Language

- Spanish is the primary language of Mexicans
- There are numerous dialects and variations
- It is becoming more common for young Mexicans to use a Spanish-English mix
- Titles are important and first names should not be used until invited to do so

B. Non-verbal Communication

- Over-familiarity, physically (touch by strangers) or verbally (casual use of first names), is not appreciated early in a relationship
- It is considered inconsiderate to stand with hands in pockets and suggests there is something to hide

- It is considered a hostile and challenging stance to stand with hands the hips
- While eating, both hands are usually kept on the table, rather than in the lap. Again, when hands are hidden it implies something is being hidden.
- When passing an object always hand it to the person; it is considered disrespectful when placed on a counter or table
- Respect is shown to the elderly; there is no objection when they are helped first in any situation
- In Mexico the height of an animal is indicated with the arm extended and the palm down, this should not be used to indicate the height of a person. Instead used a raised index finger.
- Although eye contact is important, prolonged eye contact should be avoided

C. Personal Space/ Touch

- Mexico is a very high contact culture meaning physical contact is common in everyday interactions
- When speaking, Mexicans will stand close and touch often
- The handshake is a customary initial greeting. Long time friends will embrace and women will often kiss on either cheek.
- Communication will usually involve a touch of the forearm or elbow; this is to signify a willingness to be friendly, nothing more

IV. Work/ Play

A. Work

- Mexicans have a very strong work ethic
- Men typically are expected to work outside the home, with traditional jobs involving farming and manual labor
- Women's "work" usually involved child rearing and household maintenance, although there are an increasing number of women entering the traditionally male work force
- Women spend a lot of their time on clothing, intricate embroidery, and meal preparation
- Punctuality is not a Mexican value. Many Mexicans have a "*manana*" (tomorrow) attitude. This value allows schedules to be flexible, making people more important than schedules, a value that is lacking in American culture.

B. Leisure

- Bullfights are a common form of recreation in Mexico and are held every Sunday and most holidays from December to April
- *Futbol*, or American soccer, is very popular
- A significant amount of time is spent on holiday celebrations

V. Health/ Wellness

A. Folk Remedies

- Many patients seeking medical care will have already sought help from family resources, especially women
- Help may be sought from an herbalist, massage therapist, midwife or *curandero* (lay healer)
- Lay healers are considered natural healers both physically and spiritually
- There are many healing herbs and folk remedies that should be taken into consideration
- All physical and mental illnesses have intrinsic “hot” or “cold” properties, as do foods
- Illness is seen as an imbalance in the “hot” and “cold” factors
- “Hot” diseases/conditions are characterized by vasodilation and high metabolic rates.
- “Cold” diseases/conditions are characterized by vasoconstriction and low metabolic rates
- “Hot” conditions are treated with “cold” medications and vice versa

B. Women’s Health

- Pregnant women will often seek prenatal care late in pregnancy or in some cases not until delivery
- Pregnancy is a “hot” condition. This is important because most foods high in protein are “hot” foods; therefore it is common for pregnant women to avoid eating foods high in protein. This should be taken into consideration when treating a pregnant woman.

C. Views on Western Medicine

- Mexicans who use folk means of treating illnesses are usually willing to simultaneously use conventional treatments, such as antibiotics and blood pressure regulators
- Most Mexicans use cosmopolitan sources of health care (primary care physician) as their primary source of health care
- It is common for Mexicans to believe that health care providers have all the answers; therefore, it is important to take what you are saying to Mexican patients seriously, as they are most likely listening intently to your suggestions.

VI. Challenges to Healthcare

- Cultural beliefs and practices may not be shared with the health professional
- Mexican tradition promotes neither disease prevention nor health promotion
- It is common in Mexican culture to wait and seek care only after the illness has progressed
- Language barriers are significant.
 - Interpreters are often necessary and ideally should be the same gender as the patient

- It is best to have Spanish speaking staff or volunteers to translate in private
 - Family members or friends may be used, but this may cause some personal or sexual complaints to be hidden
 - Using children to translate for a parent puts the child and the parent in a difficult reversed power and authority position
 - Using a child as a translator should be used as a last resort
- Mexican patients are unlikely to be aggressive or assertive in health care interactions
- Direct disagreement with a provider is uncommon; the usual response is silence and noncompliance
- Mexicans utilize flexible schedules that emphasize people over schedules, with little regard to punctuality.

VII. Suggestions for Healthcare Providers

- Interactions with patients and families should be formal and concurrently warm, at least early in the relationship
 - Over time, formality may decrease and warmth increase
 - Use formal terms of address, until invited to use more personal terms
- Titles are important and first names should not be used until invited to do so
- Over-familiarity, physically (touch by strangers) or verbally (casual use of first names), is not appreciated early in a relationship
- Although eye contact is important, prolonged eye contact is considered rude and should be avoided
- Although written instructions are important, personal instructions on medications and treatments are better understood
- Personal instructions that are direct, active and visual are most effective
- Brochures are not usually helpful and should be avoided
- Close personal space and a brief non-intimate touch makes compliance a personal favor and patients are more likely to follow through
- Most patients ask few questions. To assess learning, ask them questions that require more than a yes or no answer.
- Publicly, women are expected to be respectful and even submissive to their husbands. Be prepared for the male in the group to answer questions, even if not addressed to him. The father, or the oldest male, holds the greatest power in most families and may make health decisions for others in the family
- Family involvement in health care is common and health care providers are strongly advised to encourage such involvement and to include the family as a resource
- Health care providers should understand and comply with patient and family gender roles

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