

# Exploring the Mexican Culture

## Background

Mexico is in the southern portion of North America, bordering the U.S. Over 11% of the U.S. population is Mexican, and Mexican families comprise over 60% of the Hispanic population. The northern parts are arid and warm, and the southern enjoy a tropical climate. During the colonial era, Spain ruled Mexico for over 300 years, spreading Catholicism and the Spanish language and traditions. Mexico gained its independence in 1812 after the Mexican War of Independence.



## Traditions and Customs

Mexican culture is a blend of indigenous cultures and the culture of Spain. Bullfighting is the national sport of Mexico. Siestas are a Mexican tradition, with a short nap early in the afternoon following the mid-day meal. A birthday tradition in Mexico is a pinata filled with candy, trinkets, and money. In Mexican families, typically, the father has ultimate authority in family decisions, and the mother is highly respected. Most Mexicans are generally polite and formal when interacting with people they do not know well.



## Holidays and Celebrations

Important Mexican holidays include the Day of the Dead, Cinco de Mayo, Mexican Independence Day, and Christmas. The most popular, Day of the Dead, is a two-day holiday to honor deceased relatives and loved ones. Day of the Dead is celebrated with parades, parties, and traditional Mexican cuisine.

## Education and Literacy

Spanish is the national language of Mexico. Though compulsory, less than half of Mexican students graduate from high school. Nearly a third of Mexicans living in the U.S. are not fluent in English.

## Health Disparities

Of Mexican immigrants, there is a higher prevalence of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and dental caries. They are three times as likely to be uninsured and often avoid seeking medical and dental care.



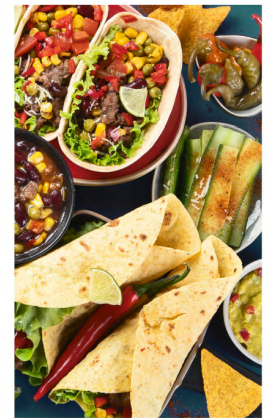
## Traditional Food Practices

Corn is the basis of the Mexican diet. Traditionally beans, chili, tomato, pumpkin, avocado, and cocoa are eaten by Mexicans. Families eat 3-5 meals per day. Tortillas are served at almost every meal, and rice is often served before the main meal. Breakfast often includes tortillas, beans, eggs, and coffee. Lunch is typically the main meal, consisting of soup, a meat dish, rice, tortilla, coffee and a dessert. The evening meal is often light and eaten late.



## Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- Mexicans view their families as their first priority, with strong family ties deeply rooted in tradition, honor, and loyalty. The fathers often participate in shopping and making purchasing decisions, but the mothers typically prepare meals.
- Mexicans tend to eat more meat and beans. Encourage them to purchase leaner cuts of meat and use less fat in bean dishes.
- Encourage fresh, frozen, and canned fruits rather than juices. Also, focus on plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables for variety to meet nutrient needs.
- Emphasize looking for fullness cues in infants and children to avoid overfeeding.
- Encourage to be mindful of appropriate portion sizes to meet nutrient needs.
- Postpartum clients may practice a tradition known as *la cuarentena*. This is a time for new mothers to rest, recover, and focus on breast/chestfeeding the first 40 days while others provide housekeeping and support.



Some questions to ask Mexican families may include:

- Who prepares meals, and how often do you eat? What is typically eaten at each meal? Do you cook from scratch?
- Where do you shop for groceries? Which foods do you eat to stay healthy or manage your health issues?
- How many tortillas do you eat every day? What types of fat or oil do you use for cooking?

## References

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