



**Enhancing
Nutrition Through
Cultural Adaptation**

Perspectives & Realities in AAPI,
Black, Latino & Asian Indian
Communities

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FNCE® 2025
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Nashville, TN | October 11-14

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Speakers

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<h2>Moderator</h2>  <p>Elizabeth Gutierrez, MS RD LDN Deputy Director Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation</p>			

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Objectives

Upon completion of this presentation, attendees will be able to:

1. Define cultural adaptation: going beyond surface structure adaptations to deeper structure interventions. Identify barriers and/or challenges and facilitators of these deep structure interventions.
2. Analyze cultural, economic, and social factors influencing food practices among four populations. Define historical context/role of food in cultural identity, challenges/solutions for improving food access/equity.
3. Identify common health issues facing these populations, including prevalent health conditions; barriers to healthcare access and utilization; and strategies for working with these communities.

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**South Asian
Indian
or
Indian American
Communities**

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Speaker



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Disclosures

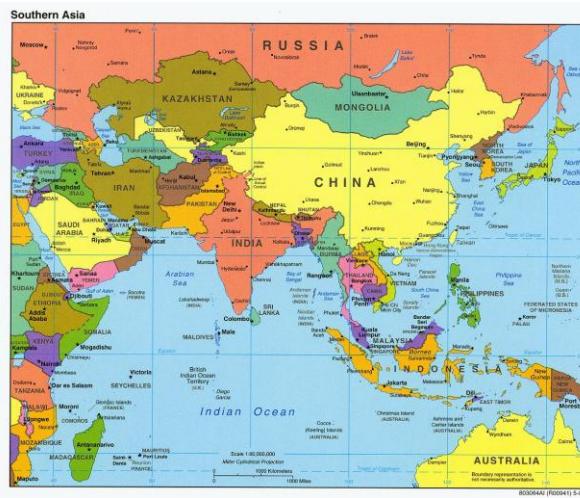
- Teaching Professor & Graduate Program Director in the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at the College of Sport, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.
- No other disclosures

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Community Profile: South Asian Indian American

- Demographics
- Asian Indian or Indian American
- 2023 Estimated population:
 - ~5 million



<https://www.wpmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/South-Asia-Political-Map-2004.jpg>

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Community Profile: South Asian Indian American

- Immigration history- three waves
 - Between 1920-24
 - Between 1945-65
 - Beyond the 70s to the present day
- The Model Minority Myth
- Implications of demographic profile



<https://www.wpmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/South-Asia-Political-Map-2004.jpg>

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Cultural Diversity



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- **Regional Diversity: Language, Food, Culture**

- 28 states and 7 union territories; Four distinct regions: North, South, East and West
- 22 Scheduled Language, traditional customs, food habits

- **Religious Diversity: Cultural Traditions, Rituals, Food**

- Several religions practiced: Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity (Syrian, Goan), Zoroastrianism, Judaism
- Vegetarianism
- Health beliefs and practices: AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy)

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Regional Diversity in Foods and Cultural Practices



alamy

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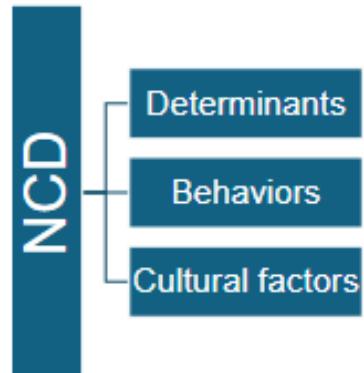
Cultural Perceptions of Health Status of Indian Americans

Non-communicable diseases of concern

- Cardiovascular disease
- Metabolic syndrome, diabetes
- Cancers
- Mental illnesses

Challenges for Indian American health in the US

- Aggregated data; suboptimal use of biomarkers
- Model Minority Myth
- Differing cultural perception related to health and disease
- Differing perception related to diet
- Multilevel causes of concern that need to be addressed



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Example: Culturally Adapted Nutrition Intervention for Indian Americans in the US

SAHELI (South Asian Healthy Lifestyle Intervention)

Factors that promote CVD risk in Indian Americans

- Early life course events
- Migration stress
- Socio economic inequalities
- Changes in environment following migration
 - Social isolation, Family conflicts, acculturation stress
 - Modify individual behaviors, self-efficacy, and motivation

Factors that can protect against chronic disease risk in Indian Americans

- Support- family, community (Familism, Allocentrism)
- Focus on socio-cultural values that align with individual's cultural identity (Health perceptions, Gender roles, Cultural identity)

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8011000/>

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Example: Culturally Adapted Nutrition Intervention for Indian Americans in the US

SAHELI (South Asian Healthy Lifestyle Intervention)

- 559 participant Type 1 hybrid RCT
- 16 week culturally adapted group-based lifestyle intervention led by community health coaches compared to control group receiving only educational materials.
- Bilingual delivery of intervention
- Clinical indicators along with self reported diet quality, physical activity and self-efficacy
- A follow up 24-person qualitative research study to highlight the role of social networks in influencing CVD health behaviors

Highlights

- Inclusion of underrepresented, limited English proficiency participants
- Multi-sectorial collaboration between health care, public health, community and academia
- Going beyond the biomedical model by leveraging socio-cultural beliefs and contextual influences leveraged going beyond the biomedical model

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8011000/>
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Practice Application for Culturally Adapting Nutrition Interventions for Indian Americans

Culturally adaptive strategies: Incorporate Cultural elements

Surface level strategies

- Use bilingual educational and program resources
- Incorporate cultural foods in dietary recommendations and educate on modification of culturally relevant foods and dishes
- Use cultural events e.g. celebrations to conduct the education program
- Use culturally relevant spaces e.g. community center, places of worship for conducting programs
- Engage community members e.g. as health coaches

Deep level strategies

- Conduct thorough assessments to understand cultural aspects of the community
- Engage in conversations with community members; focus on the "why"
- Incorporate cultural values e.g. familism and allocentrism that prioritize family and community
- Use interpreters to convey contextual meaning and content
- Use social supports and networks

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Black Communities

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Disclosures

- Nourish
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- Private Practice - Living Healthy
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Community Profile

- 2023 U.S. Black population:
 - Estimated at 48.3 million
 - 12.4% of the total U.S. population.
- Relatively young: median age = 32.6 yrs
- Growing percentage is foreign-born
 - Significant number of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean.
- By 2060, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that this number will increase to 9.5 million, or more than double the current level.



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<https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2022/01/20/one-in-ten-black-people-living-in-the-u-s-are-immigrants>

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Community Profile

- Slavery in the United States
- Forced migration and population growth
- The domestic slave trade
- Population increase despite abolition
- Natural reproduction
- Disruptive impact on families
- Economic inequality
- Psychological and emotional trauma
- Mistrust of institutions



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Health Status

Chronic Diseases

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Cancer

Nutrition & Obesity

- Obesity
- Diet quality

Mental Health

- Depression & anxiety
- Stigma and cultural mistrust



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Health Status

Maternal & Infant Health

- Maternal mortality
- Infant mortality

Infectious Diseases

- HIV/AIDS
- COVID-19

Social Determinants of Health

- Economic inequality
- Environmental racism
- Healthcare access



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Nutrition-Related Education Interventions for Blacks

1. Culturally Tailored Nutrition Education Programs

- “Body and Soul” Program
- The DASH Diet with Soul
- The “With Every Heartbeat Is Life” curriculum by the NIH

2. Community-Based Interventions

- Barbershop/salon health initiatives
- Farmers markets & urban gardens

3. Faith-Based and Spiritual Health Programs

- Health ministry programs
- Daniel Fast Support Groups

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Nutrition-Related Education Interventions for Blacks

4. Culturally Adapted Behavior Change Models

- Representation of Black educators or community members as facilitators.
- Inclusion of cultural storytelling and ancestral wisdom.
- Discussion of systemic barriers (e.g., food deserts, racism in healthcare) and empowerment strategies.

5. Cooking Demonstrations and Traditional Food Modifications

- Using olive oil instead of lard.
- Baking or air-frying instead of deep-frying.



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6. Media & Technology-Based Interventions

- Culturally affirming YouTube or Instagram content (like plant-based soul food).
- Mobile apps with recipes and meal planning aligned with African heritage diets.

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Nutrition-Related Education Interventions for Blacks

7. Policy, Advocacy, and Environmental Interventions

- Advocating for nutrition curricula in schools that reflect African Diaspora contributions.
- SNAP-Ed and WIC culturally tailored education sessions with Afrocentric meal plans.

8. Health Professional Training and Provider-Led Programs

- Using tools like the “African Heritage Diet Pyramid” from Oldways.
- Supporting Black-led nutrition practices and RDs of color through mentorship and grants.



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Successes and Challenges: Perspectives



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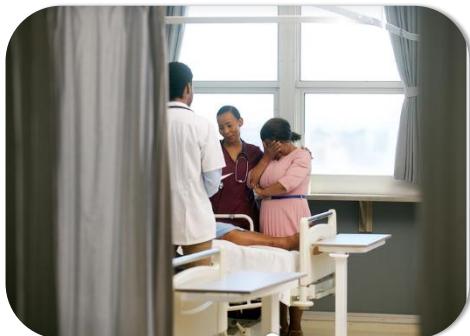
Success: Strengths & Protective Factors

- Cultural assets
- Growing awareness
- Cultural food heritage as a strength
- Community-based health initiatives
- Growing representation in nutrition fields

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Successes and Challenges: Perspectives



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Challenges: Perspectives

- Historical & structural barriers
- Medical & nutrition mistrust
- Economic constraints
- Cultural disconnect in messaging

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Call to Action

- Champion policy change for equitable access
- Diversify the nutrition workforce
- Acknowledge and address structural racism in nutrition care
- Elevate community voices in program design
- Integrate Afrocentric & cultural food practices in counseling
- Conduct equity-focused assessments
- Engage in long-term community partnerships



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What Can RDs Do?

Cultural adaptation is not about replacing traditional foods.

It's about honoring them, making them more health-supportive and ensuring access for all.



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- 1. Honor and integrate cultural food traditions**
- 2. Address barriers to access & affordability**
- 3. Build trust through representation and cultural competence**

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What Can RDs Do?

- 4. Tailor health messaging to cultural context**
- 5. Support chronic disease prevention & management**



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Latino Communities

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Community Profile

- Latin America includes Mexico in Central America, Central and South America, some Caribbean islands and is home to more than 800 distinct Indigenous groups.
- With over 500 languages, Spanish is the dominant language followed by Portuguese and hundreds of distinct Indigenous languages.
- Hispanic/Latino individuals represent about 17.8% of the population in the United States and is estimated to grow to 27.5% of the total population in America by 2060.

Kittler PG, Sucher KP. Culture, Foodways and Counseling: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Nutrition Care in the United States. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; 2017. Accessed July 31, 2025. <https://www.eatrightstore.org/product/type/books/culture-foodways-counseling-a-guide-to-culturally-sensitive-nutrition-care-in-the-united-states>

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Image Credit: PMy. Political Map of South America. Vector illustration. Adobe Stock. License 197693310. Accessed August 30, 2025. <https://stock.adobe.com>

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Community Profile

- As of 2021, 34% of the recent Hispanic immigrant population was Mexican. The largest group among Hispanic (54%) and U.S. immigrants (24%).
- Recently, more Hispanic immigrants have come to the U.S. from:
 - Guatemala
 - Honduras
 - Dominican Republic
 - Venezuela

Noe-Bustamante L, Flores A. 8 facts about recent Latino immigrants to the U.S. Pew Research Center. Published September 28, 2023. Accessed July 30, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reports/2023/09/28/8-facts-about-recent-latino-immigrants-to-the-us/>

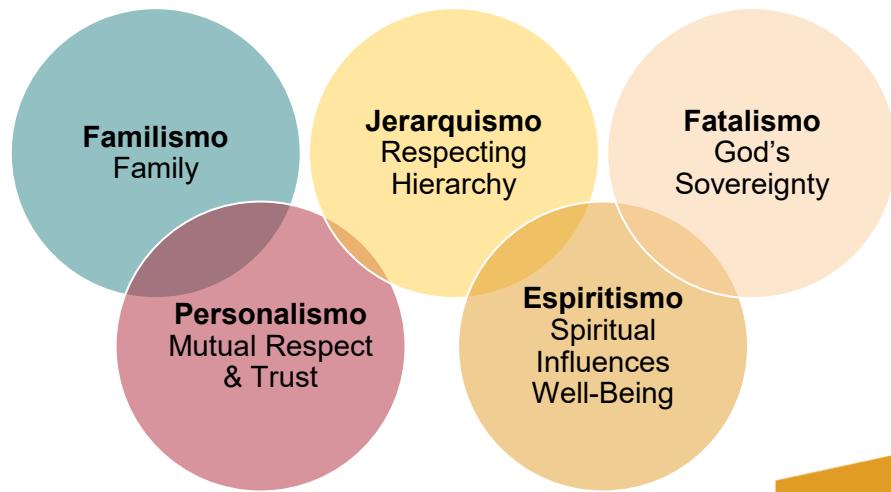
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Community Profile: Cultural Values



Kittler PG, Sucher KP. Culture, Foodways and Counseling: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Nutrition Care in the United States. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; 2017. Accessed July 31, 2025. <https://www.eatrightstore.org/product-type/books/culture-foodways-counseling-a-guide-to-culturally-sensitive-nutrition-care-in-the-united-states>
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Health Status

- Obesity:** Between 2015-2018, 80% of Hispanic Women were overweight or obese. Hispanic children are 1.7x more likely to be obese compared to non-Hispanic White children.
- T2DM:** In 2022, 60% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, and 1.5 times more likely to die from diabetes compared to non-Hispanic white adults.
- Lack of Access to Care:** In 2022, Hispanic mothers were 90% more likely to receive late or no prenatal care as non-Hispanic white mothers.
- Poverty and Food Insecurity:** Poverty rate was 17% in 2022.
- Language and Cultural Barriers:** Per Census Bureau, 28% report speaking English "less than very well."
- Cancer:** Hispanic adults were almost twice as likely to have, and to die from, liver cancer than non-Hispanic white adults.

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Nutrition-Related Education Interventions

- Traditional Latino cuisine is rich in fruits, grains, beans, and vegetables.
- Ask details about meal preparation as recipes can vary by country or region.
- Suggest healthy swaps to reduce calories or suggest ways to incorporate more fruits and vegetables in meals and limit processed foods.
- Consider community-based programs that include Promotoras or community health worker programs.
- Offer Spanish language nutrition education classes and invest in translation services for Spanish nutrition handouts.
- Be mindful of cultural and religious practices. Many observe Catholic traditions such as fasting or abstaining from specific foods during Lent.



Image Credit: Manuela. *Capirotada (Mexican Bread Pudding)*. Adobe Stock. License 491058762. Accessed August 30, 2025. <https://stock.adobe.com>

Manuela. *Mexican Tacos: Shrimp Tacos, Served with Salsa Mexicana*. Adobe Stock. License 1534820789. Accessed August 30, 2025. <https://stock.adobe.com>

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All Countries

Colombia

Foods by Category - 128 Foods

Foods made from grains bread pasta (pasta or spaghetti) rice (White rice)	Vitamin A-rich fruits cantaloupe (cantaloupe melon) mamey sapote (zapote) mango papaya pejibaye palm fruit (chontaduro)	Cheese cheese (Cheese, mozzarella) cheese curds (curds) fresh cheese	Packaged ultra-processed salty snacks (Potato chips, Cheetos, Yupis, Boliqueso, Doritos, De Todito)
Whole grains brown rice maize (fresh corn) maize biscuits (achiras) maize patties (Arepas) popcorn quinoa tamales (envueltos o bollos, tamales)	Citrus grapefruit mandarin orange	Yogurt yogurt	Instant noodles instant noodles instant soup
Processed meats bologna chorizo sausage cold cuts cold cuts or sausages ham hot dogs	Deep fried foods French fries with hotdog fried chicken fried corn dough with cheese (huancuero) fried dough with cheese (deditos o palitos de queso) fried egg arepa fried empanadas		

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World Food Map. World Food Map website. Accessed August 14, 2025. <https://www.worldfoodmap.org/>

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Perspectives and Realities

Dietary acculturation is associated with altered gut microbiome, circulating metabolites, and cardiovascular disease risk in US Hispanics and Latinos: results from HCHS/SOL

- Greater dietary acculturation was associated with elevated CVD risk, and changes in gut microbiome and circulating metabolites among US Hispanic and Latino adults.
- Dietary acculturation led to increased consumption refined grains and reduced intake of whole grains, beans, and fruit.



Image Credit: Chernybee. Heart Breaking Apart Made of Pulses. Adobe Stock. License 55144390. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://stock.adobe.com>

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Success & Challenges: Food Security



- **RDN Led Health Equity Projects**
 - Can address food insecurity through screening tools and community partnerships.

- **Screening Tools**
 - Veteran Health Administration's ACORN (A Collaborative Outcomes Resource Network) Screening Tool.
 - Vital Hunger Sign™ Screening Tool.

- **Challenges:**

- Gaining clinician buy-in to implement screening tools and clinical reminders in health system electronic health records.

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What Can RDs Do?



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- Partner with community programs and health leaders.
- Integrate culturally relevant resources into your practice.
- Discuss and honor cultural preferences.
- Customize & tailor education to meet the needs of your unique cultural needs of your clients.
- Consider implementing a RDN led health equity project in your health system or practice.
- RDNs are uniquely qualified to drive change, overcome health disparities, and reduce barriers to improve outcomes!

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Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Communities

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Disclosures

- Employee and Research Support
 - Assistant Professor at Hunter College, City University of New York

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Community Profile

AAPI is a Diverse Group:

(Asian American and Pacific Islander)

- Includes individuals with heritage from all parts of Asia, including Central, East, Southeast, and South Asia, as well as Pacific Islands.
- Over 50 ethnicities and over 100 languages.
- About 7% of the US population. The fastest-growing population in the US.
- Immigration history affects cultural adaptation.



AAPCHO, 2024; Pew Research.org.

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AAPI Health and Diet

- Elevated chronic disease risks (CVD, T2D)
- High prevalence of mental health issues/eating disorders, food insecurity, and various cancers in some subgroups.
- Lack of information from national surveys.
- Significant variability exists.

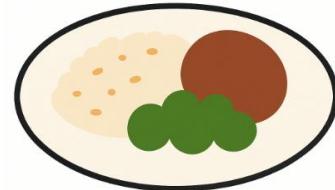


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Office of Minority Health, 2025; National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.; Nhan and Wang, 2023.
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Prevalence of T2D among Adults 45-84 Years of Age

Groups	Prevalence
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	34.50%
Filipinos	31.00%
South Asians	29.10%
Latino	25.30%
Blacks	24.90%
Korean	18.80%
Southeast Asians	18.70%
Japanese	18.10%
Chinese	15.60%
Non-Hispanic Whites	12.80%

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AAPI Health and Diet

Regional differences of dietary patterns:

• Northeastern:

- Fruits and vegetables, soy-based food, white rice and refined flours, fermented and pickled food, "Yin & Yang", various cooking methods (steaming, boiling, stewing, roasting, and sautéing)

• Southeastern:

- Herbs, spices, palm and coconut oil, coconut milk, sticky rice and rice vermicelli, various cooking methods (grilling, stir-frying, braising, and deep-frying)

• South:

- Vegetables, lentils, peas, rice, strong spices, refined-grain flour, various cooking methods (simmering, roasting, sautéing)

- Lack of dietary fibers from whole grains
- High sodium
- High saturated fat
- High added sugar beverages
- Low calcium and vitamin D

American Heart Association; Lichtenstein et al., 2021; Kwan et al., 2023
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Barriers to Effective Interventions



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Culturally Adapted Interventions

• Screen at 23 Initiative

- A national campaign to raise awareness among AAPIs and health-care professionals.
- Test AAPI individuals for diabetes at a lower BMI cutoff of 23 instead of 25 kg/m²
- Massachusetts: Predicted to identify an additional 6,000 cases of diabetes and 20,000 cases of prediabetes among AAPIs

• Culturally Tailored Dietary Interventions for Gluten-related Disorders

- 62 participants, 8 weeks educational intervention: A combination of culturally tailored workshops, handouts, group chats, and Q&A sessions.
- Result: High adherence to the diet and satisfaction rate.
 - Thorough community assessment and supportive network with peers.
 - Effective communication strategies for dietary needs.
 - Collaborative relationships.

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The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology, 2018; Zhang et al., 2023

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Application: Strategies for Enhancing Nutrition & Health

- Address common health risks.
- Embrace traditions: focus on cultural dish adaptation.
- Consider cultural beliefs and norms (e.g., family-style eating occasions, self-prescriptions and traditional medicines), level of cultural adaptation, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Use community-based intervention to address social support.
- Advocate for more research that include large AAPI subgroup patient samples.

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