



Enhancing Nutrition Through Cultural Adaptation

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

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FNCE 2025

Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo[®]
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Moderator

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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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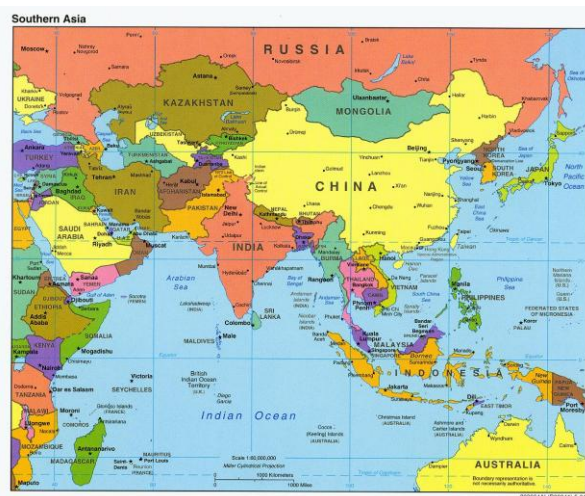
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- No other disclosures

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Community Profile: South Asian Indian American

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



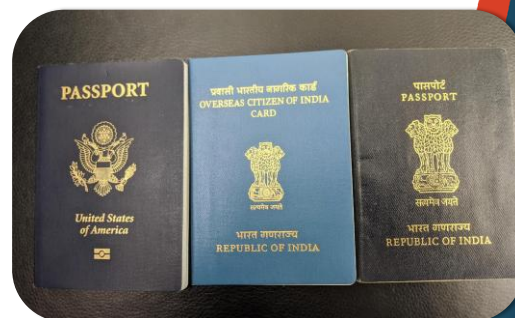
<https://www.wpmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/South-Asia-Political-Map-2004.jpg>

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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)

Regional Diversity in Foods and Cultural Practices



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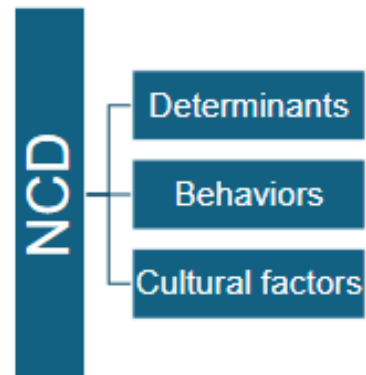
Cultural Perceptions of Health Status of Indian Americans

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

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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.

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

Success: Strengths & Protective Factors



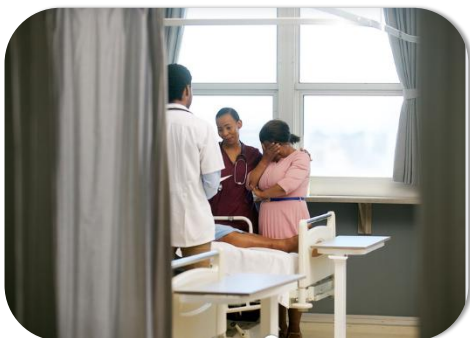
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- Cultural assets
- Growing awareness
- Cultural food heritage as a strength
- Community-based health initiatives
- Growing representation in nutrition fields

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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: Pety. 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-reads/2023/09/28/8-facts-about-recent-latino-immigrants-to-the-us/>

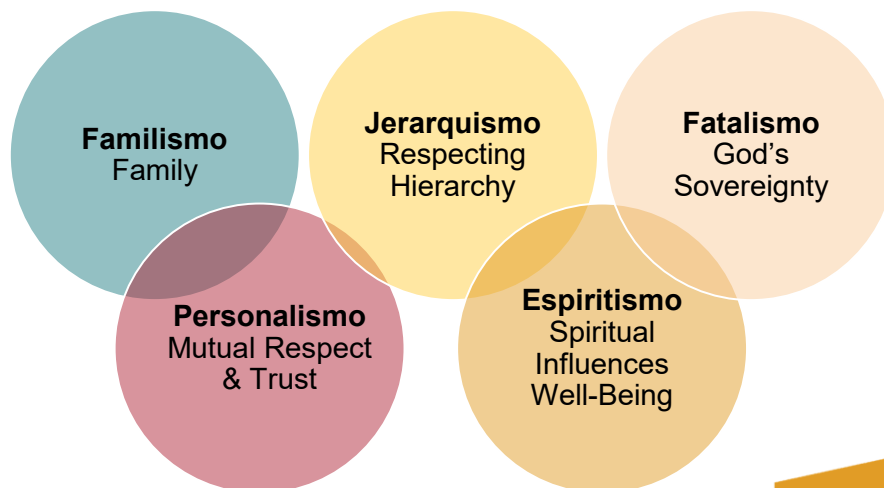
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Image Credit: Lunamaria. Mexican Food Mixed Guacamole Nachos Chili Sauce. Adobe Stock. License 86785279. Accessed August 30, 2025. <https://stock.adobe.com>

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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 \(White rice\)](#)




Whole grains

[brown rice](#)
[maize \(fresh corn\)](#)
[maize biscuits \(achiras\)](#)
[maize patties \(Arepas\)](#)
[popcorn](#)
[quinoa](#)
[tamales \(envueltos o bollos, tamales\)](#)



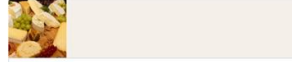
Vitamin A-rich fruits

[cantaloupe \(cantaloupe melon\)](#)
[mamey sapote \(zapote\)](#)
[mango](#)
[papaya](#)
[pejibaye palm fruit \(chontaduro\)](#)




Citrus

[grapefruit](#)
[mandarin](#)
[orange](#)




Cheese

[cheese \(Cheese, mozzarella\)](#)
[cheese curds \(curds\)](#)
[fresh cheese](#)




Yogurt

[yogurt](#)




Processed meats

[bologna](#)
[chorizo sausage](#)
[cold cuts](#)
[cold cuts or sausages](#)
[ham](#)
[hot dogs](#)




Packaged ultra-processed salty snacks

[Packaged ultra-processed salty snacks \(Potato chips, Cheetos, Yupis, Boliqueso, Doritos, De Todito\)](#)



Instant noodles

[instant noodles](#)
[instant soup](#)



Deep fried foods

[French fries with hotdog](#)
[fried chicken](#)
[fried corn dough with cheese \(buñuelos\)](#)
[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.



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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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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.

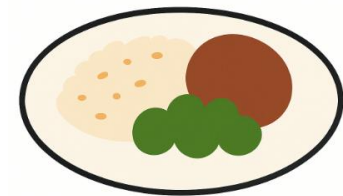


Image created by Jera Zhang using Procreate.
Office of Minority Health, 2025; National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.; Nhan and Wang, 2023.
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Prevalence of T2D among Adults 45-84 Years of Age

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%
Japanses	18.10%
Chinese	15.60%
Non-Hispanic Whites	12.80%

Table created by Jera Zhang using Microsoft Excel. Data derived from US Census (2020) and Kwan et al. (2023).
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AAPI Health and Diet

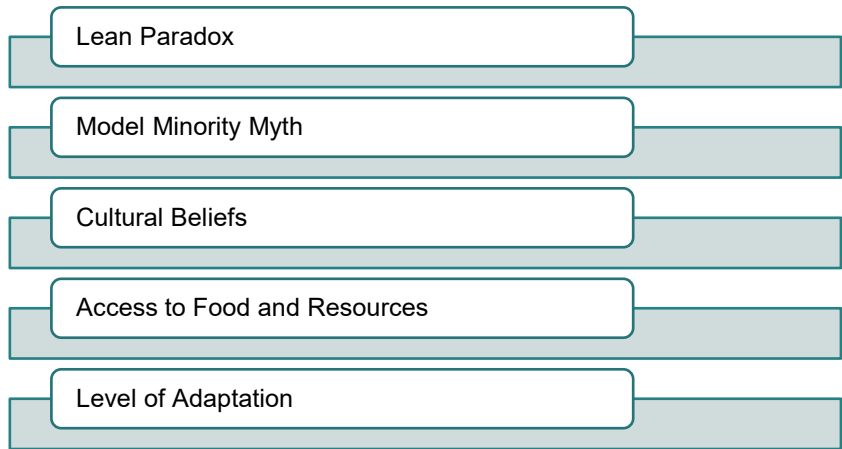
Regional differences of dietary patterns:

- **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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