

Mexican Food and Culture Fact Sheet

Traditional Foods and Dishes Staple foods include: tomatoes, squash, avocado, cocoa, vanilla, tortillas, tamales, beans, rice, bread, mango pineapple, papaya, sweet potato, beans, eggs, poultry, fish, *chorizo* [spicy pork sausage], and *aguas natuales* [fresh fruit blended with sugar and water] ^{1,2}

Día de los Muertos

- Special holiday to celebrate loved ones who have passed away. ³
- Families provide *ofrenda* [offering] which include four elements: water, wind, earth, and fire. Earth, is represented through food, such as *pan de muerto* [traditional bread]. ^{3,4}

The national dish is red *mole* [sauce]. ⁵

Posadas [Christmas- time parties]

Party foods include *buñuelos* [fried pastries with sugar] *colación* [candies], tamales, *ponche* [hot fruit bunch] and *atole* [warm, milk based beverage, flavored with chocolate, fruit or nuts and thickened with *masa* (corn flour)] ^{4,6}

Día de los reyes [Day of Kings] – *rosca* [ring shaped bread] is shared⁶

Cuaresma [Lent] – Fasting period, and meatless meals of Ash Wednesday and Fridays during lent ⁶

The majority of Mexicans are Roman Catholic. Religion typically plays a major role in their family, community, and diet. ²

Traditional Eating Patterns:

Traditionally, Mexicans ate four-five meals. Now, three meals per day is most typical.^{2,6}

- *Desayuno* (Breakfast) includes coffee, *pan dulce* (sweet rolls), tortillas, beans, and occasionally *huevos rancheros* [eggs] ²
- *Comida* (Lunch) main meal of the day (1-3 pm) typically a soup, meat dish, rice, tortilla, coffee and dessert ²
- *Sena* (Supper) Light meal eaten after 9 pm ²
- Families gather at meals to build a sense of togetherness. The women in the family typically prepare the meal. ⁵
- Rice is usually served first before the main meal. ⁶
- Chiles are a common main ingredient in traditional Mexican meals ⁶

Traditional Health Beliefs:

Religion plays a major role in traditional health beliefs and serves as a motivator and support for seeking medical advice. ⁶Herbal and folk remedies are often used for self treatment. ⁶

Typical home remedies include drinks, tea, and ointments ⁶

For example: self-remedies believed to lower blood sugar ⁶

Guarubmo, chancarro, hormiguillo [tree leaves boiled for tea]

Maguey [agave plant]

Napales, nopoolitos [prickly pear cactus]

Sábila [aloe vera]

Gatuno [Cat's claw]

Curanderos- Folk healers or practitioners ⁶

- Treat a variety of physical, mental, and spiritual burdens ⁶

When a person becomes ill ⁶

- The mother decides when an illness is beyond her ability to treat
 - Family is involved in the decision making process
 - Families usually seek help from *curandero* before consulting a Western Medicine health care provider
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Current Food Practices:

- Traditional Mexican diets are typically limited in added fat and high in fruits and vegetables and current Mexican American diets are often high in fat and inadequate in fruits and vegetables ⁷
- Traditional diet is high in grains and legumes ⁸

Food choices are influenced by income, education, urbanization, geographic region, and family customs ²

- Due to American acculturation, Mexican Americans eat less rice and beans ²
- Mexicans in the US eat more meat and saturated fat ²

Mexican Americans comprise 12 percent of those living below the poverty line ²

- May have need for cheaper less healthy foods due to poverty ²
- Mexican Americans tend to lead a more sedentary lifestyle ⁸
- The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is **two to three times** higher in Hispanic Americans, and notably high in Mexican Americans.⁸

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