

Mexican Descent

Mexican-descent refers to those whose parents or grandparents have their origins in Mexico. Mexican Americans are Americans of Mexican ancestry whose families emigrated from Mexico and who are living in the U.S., irrespective of their generation. The U.S. is home to the second-largest Mexican community in the world, 24% of the entire Mexican-origin population of the world, second only to Mexico itself. Mexican Americans comprise 11.3% of the U.S. population and 61.5% of all Latino Americans. The most frequent language spoken by Mexicans is Spanish, but some may also speak languages from 68 different indigenous linguistic groups and other languages brought to Mexico by immigration or learned by Mexican immigrants residing in other nations.



Common Nutritional Approaches

Traditional Mexican diets are usually a mixture of Native Mesoamerican foods (pre-Hispanic) and Hispanic foods, which primarily consist of corn-based dishes cooked with chilies, garlic, onions, herbs, beans, squash, citrus fruits, rice, meats, and lard.

Typically, the Mexican diet is rich in carbohydrates, provided mainly by corn and corn products (usually tortillas, present at almost every meal), beans, rice and bread. Beans, eggs, fish, shellfish and meats (mostly pork and poultry) provide an adequate protein source for this diet. Chorizo (spicy pork sausage) is served for breakfast with eggs. Popular fruits and vegetables are tomatoes, squash, sweet potato, avocado, mango, pineapple, papaya, and aguas frescas (fresh fruit blended with sugar and water).

Food is often spicy (there are ninety varieties of chilies), but spicy sauces vary with the region of Mexico. Because of the extensive use of frying as a cooking method, the diet is also high in fat. Coffee with large amounts of milk and sugar is often preferred. Atole is a warm, milk-based beverage, flavored with chocolate, fruit or nuts and thickened with finely ground masa (corn flour).



Practical Tips and Substitutions for Eating Healthy

- ➔ Limit starchy vegetables (corn, potatoes, plantains or yucca) to no more than one portion per meal. Add a leafy green to at least 2 meals a day.
- ➔ Choose between beans or rice. Avoid consumption of both in the same meal.
- ➔ Limit the amount of corn/flour tortillas to 3 per meal (5-7 inch tortillas). Use locally sourced, low carbohydrate tortillas options.
- ➔ Avoid sugar drinks as: jarritos, orchatas, aguas frescas, fruit juices and sodas.



Healthful Eating Plan & Meal Ideas

Breakfast Ideas

- ➔ **Breakfast Burritos:** Use low-calorie, high-fiber tortillas, filled with scrambled eggs, cheddar cheese and black beans. Topped with cilantro and slices of avocado.
- ➔ **Chocolate Smoothie Bowl:** Mix 1 cup of low-fat Greek yogurt with cocoa powder, whipped cream and a dash of honey. Top with fresh berries and coconut flakes.
- ➔ **Yogurt and Fruit:** Add 1/2 - 1 cup of fresh fruit (mango, pineapple, papaya or apple) to 1 cup of plain Greek yogurt. Add a dash of honey and top with coconut flakes.

Lunch/Dinner Ideas

- ➔ **Fish Taco Bowls:** Use cabbage slaw or lettuce for the base, grilled salmon or tilapia for the protein, top with guacamole, fresh sweet mango and vinaigrette.
- ➔ **Steak Tacos:** Use corn or low-carb tortillas. Topped with seasoned flank steak, guacamole, pico de gallo, queso fresco and a squeeze of lime.
- ➔ **Shrimp Quesadilla:** Use corn or low-carb tortillas. For the quesadilla filling, add grilled shrimp seasoned with orange juice and garlic, grilled onions, sliced red or yellow peppers, and Monterey Jack cheese. Top with sour cream and salsa.
- ➔ **Chili:** Use low-fat ground beef, kidney and pinto beans, vegetables (such as celery, diced tomatoes, onion, peppers, and garlic). Top with sour cream and shredded cheddar cheese.
- ➔ **Grilled Chicken Salad:** Use romaine lettuce for the base. Add seasoned grilled chicken, top with tomatoes, avocado and peppers. Use vinaigrette dressing by combining olive oil, honey, salt and pepper.
- ➔ **Cheese and Chorizo-stuffed Jalapenos:** Use medium-size jalapeno peppers and fill with ground chorizo, mushrooms and whipped cream cheese. Bake in oven for 15 minutes at 400 degrees F.



Clinical Pearls

- ✓ Spices are very important for the Mexican-descent flavors. They can be used without adding calories or fat to the meal.
- ✓ Tortillas are consumed daily. Focus on limitation of quantity rather than completely omitting in the dietary recommendations.
- ✓ Commonly consumed baked goods include sweet bread and pastries. Providers should educate patients on the high carbohydrate, high glycemic index content of these food items.
- ✓ When recommending a low carbohydrate diet, guacamole, sour cream (crema agria) and salsa are good to pair with vegetables as a healthy snack.
- ✓ Food tastes better when it is prepared and shared with *la familia*.

References: Nativity and Nutritional Behaviors in the Mexican Origin Population Living in the US-M. *Immigr Minor Health*. 2011 Feb; 13(1): 94-100. doi: 10.1007/s10903-010-9342-8exico Border Region <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3034163/>; Metabolic responses to a traditional Mexican diet compared with a commonly consumed US diet in women of Mexican descent: a randomized crossover feeding trial. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2016 Feb; 103(2): 366-374. Published online 2015 Dec 30. doi: 10.3945/ajcn.115.119016 [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4733259/#:~:text=Traditional%20Mexican%20diets%20are%20usually,%2C%20and%20lard%20\(32\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4733259/#:~:text=Traditional%20Mexican%20diets%20are%20usually,%2C%20and%20lard%20(32).); HEALTH TIPS- Dietary Guidelines for Latino in the U.S. <https://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/ctl/2018/06/health-tips-dietary-guidelines-for-latino-in-the-u-s/>; Cultural Diversity: Eating in America. Mexican- American Fact Sheet The Ohio State University <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid=CF86959212B81B412623E17CE8D5191E?doi=10.1.1.172.7578&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

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