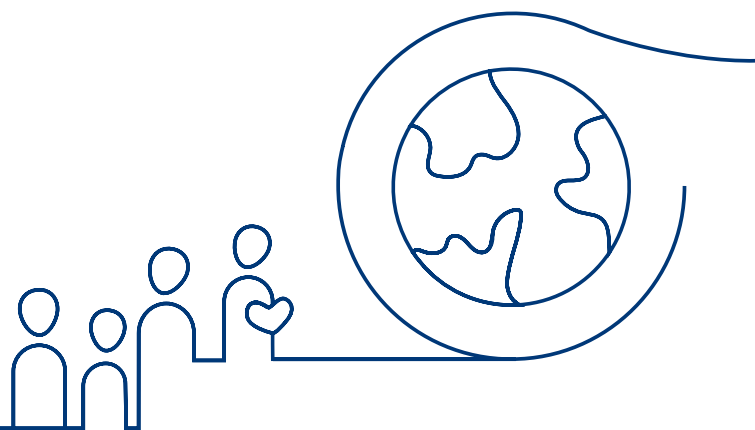


# The role of culture in obesity

## Review how cultural influences impact obesity



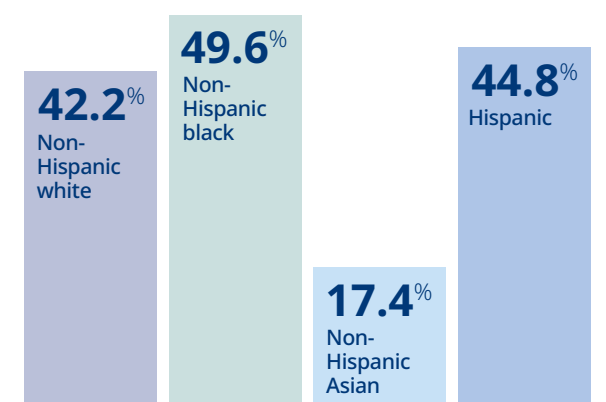
Obesity is a serious, complex, chronic disease influenced not only by genetics and environment but also by culture.<sup>1-3</sup> Cultural factors influence individual behaviors, such as eating patterns, physical activity levels, and perceptions of body weight.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding your patients' cultural beliefs and practices may be helpful when building a weight-management plan that fits their individual needs.<sup>3-5</sup>

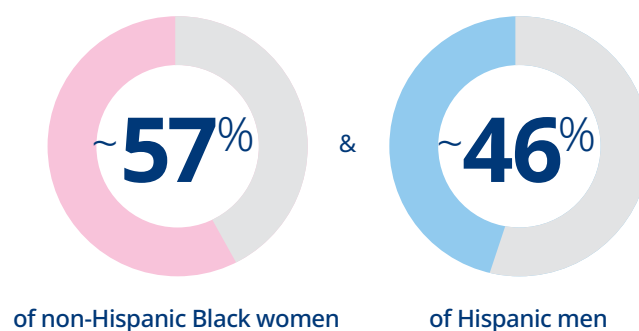
## Racial and ethnic disparities in obesity rates

More than 2 in 5 adults (42.4%) in the United States have obesity, defined as a BMI of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or greater. However, the prevalence of obesity for some minority populations is even higher.<sup>5,a</sup>

### Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black adults have the highest rates of overweight or obesity<sup>5,a</sup>



### More than half non-Hispanic Black women and nearly half of Hispanic men have obesity<sup>5,a</sup>



Obesity prevalence in the United States is **≥35%**<sup>4,b</sup>

- in 31 states and the District of Columbia among non-Hispanic Black adults
- in 8 states in among Hispanic adults
- in only 1 state among non-Hispanic White adults

## Cultural drivers of obesity

Culture can shape values and norms that may influence body weight and in turn, weight change.<sup>3</sup> Some examples of cultural influences you may want to consider when having a discussion with your patients about their weight<sup>3,4</sup>:

<b>Dietary traditions</b>	Culture can influence eating patterns which differs among populations, classes, and groups. For example, some populations may consume food high in fat as part of cultural practice.
<b>Perceptions of body size</b>	Some cultures have greater acceptance of overweight and body-image satisfaction. For example, well-rounded female bodies may be seen as both desirable and a marker of high social status.
<b>Physical activity</b>	Culturally determined attitudes may influence physical activity. Cultural beliefs may prioritize education, needs of others, and body image ideals.
<b>Sedentary behavior</b>	In some cultural contexts, “leisure-time” may be translated literally, or television/ screen time may be viewed as a symbol of economic sufficiency and family time.
<b>Food access</b>	Social and environmental characteristics, such as discrimination, can impact food choices and access to healthy, affordable foods and beverages.
<b>Acculturation</b>	Immigration may result in dietary modifications such as decreases in the consumption of traditional foods and fiber, and increases in total fat, sugar, and calories.

## Strategies for working with cultural influences on your patient’s body weight

Integrating culturally sensitive care by considering the relevant social, economic, policy, and media influences can be helpful when discussing obesity and tailoring intervention approaches. What you can do<sup>6-8</sup>:

- Learn about patient-specific cultures and how they pertain to nutrition
- Aim to understand the patient perspective of diet patterns
- Refer patients to a registered dietitian for individualized nutrition guidance, as needed
- Collaborate with registered dietitians to support recommendations and improve adherence



**References:** 1. Garvey WT, Mechanick JL, Brett EM, et al. American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists and American College of Endocrinology comprehensive clinical practice guidelines for medical care of patients with obesity. *Endocr Pract.* 2016;22(suppl 3):1-203. 2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adult obesity facts. Published May 14, 2024. Accessed April 22, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/adult-obesity-facts/index.html>. 3. Bray GA, Bouchard C. Handbook of obesity: epidemiology, etiology, and physiopathology 3rd ed, Florida: CRC Press. 2014. 4. Petersen R, Pan L, Blanck HM. Racial and ethnic disparities in adult obesity in the United States: CDC's tracking to inform state and local action. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2019;16:e46. 5. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). Overweight and obesity Statistics. Accessed April 22, 2025. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-statistics/overweight-obesity?dkrd=hispt0880>. 6. Nemec K. Cultural awareness of eating patterns in the health care setting. *Clin Liver Dis (Hoboken).* 2020;16(5):204-207. 7. Caprio S, Daniels SR, Drewnowski A, et al. Influence of race, ethnicity, and culture on childhood obesity: Implications for prevention and treatment. *Diabetes Care.* 2008;31(11):2211-2221. 8. Dhurhander E, Massie N, Bollie S. Ask the experts: how do cultural factors impact obesity. <https://www.obesityaction.org/resources/ask-the-experts-how-do-cultural-factors-impact-obesity>. Accessed April 22, 2025.



Visit **novoMEDLINK.com** for additional resources for you and your patients with obesity.

novoMEDLINK™ is a trademark of Novo Nordisk A/S.  
Novo Nordisk is a registered trademark of Novo Nordisk A/S.  
© 2025 Novo Nordisk All rights reserved. US250B00437 July 2025

For Health Care Professionals  
**novoMEDLINK™** >

