

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH BEHAVIORS FOR BETTER HEART HEALTH MIGRATION HISTORY, HEALTH BEHAVIORS, AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE RISK FACTORS IN OVERWEIGHT MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

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Diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and gallbladder disease are more prevalent among individuals with abnormally high blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood glucose levels. Research has also shown that these diseases are more common among Mexican-American women in the United States as compared to non-Hispanic White women of the same age. Independent studies show that the risk factors of cardiovascular diseases are higher among individuals with poor health habits (such as lack of exercise), smoking and excessive drinking, irregular sleeping, and a high calorie diet.

For Mexican Americans who were born in Mexico, risk factors for cardiovascular diseases may be affected by their move to the United States, as well as their family history of disease. However, because few, if any, studies have looked at the three-way link between moving from a native land, health habits, and cardiovascular risk factors, it was uncertain whether the uprooting from a homeland or health behavior alone could explain the high rate of cardiovascular diseases in Mexican Americans.

In this issue, researchers found that overweight Mexican-American women of southern Texas (aged 18 to 65 years) had poorer exercise habits (did not exercise) and increased blood

pressures the longer they had been away from their homeland. After using research methods to analyze the data, the researchers concluded that poor exercise behavior is the root cause of high blood pressure and the longer the stay in the United States may be linked to poorer exercise habits.

Health behaviors examined in this study were tobacco and alcohol use, sleeping, exercise and dietary practices. The cardiovascular disease risk factors were plasma glucose, abdominal obesity, blood pressures and blood lipids, reduced to three factors (blood pressures, lipids/glucose, and body fat/glucose). In addition to the previously mentioned conclusion, it was also observed that all cardiovascular risk factors were elevated in older women.

The results of this study offer some guidance for reducing cardiovascular disease risk factors in Mexican-American women. Exercise programs and smoking cessation programs will be important to reduce risks. Because younger women scored higher on exercise than the older women, it would be particularly important to find out how older women could be encouraged to exercise. Finally, the authors believe that these findings would also be true for Mexican-American women living in other parts of the United States.