



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients' and co-workers' views, traditions, and actions. While you can use this information as a guide, keep in mind that all people within a culture are not the same. Be sure to ask your patients and their families about specific beliefs, practices, and customs that may be relevant and important during medical treatment and hospitalization.

When describing the Indian culture, the following information could apply to Indians visiting from India. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all people from India.



general information

- ✓ You should address the patient in a courteous manner. All people, without regard to culture, race, gender and disability, want to be treated with respect and courtesy.
- ✓ The official languages of India are Hindu and English, which is mostly used in administration and education, and was a mainstay of the British colonial rule.
- ✓ A great majority of Indians are Hindu. About a fifth are affiliated Christian, Muslim and other minority religions. Although the caste system was abolished, in some respects it still plays a significant role.
- ✓ Because Hinduism arose from no single person or institution, it is seen as eternal and unchanging in its essence. Believers regard it as having existed forever.

inter-personal relationships

relationship roles

- ✓ Indians arrange marriages among their own kind because they believe marriage needs family support to be successful.

decision-making

- ✓ There is a conflict in many Indian homes where teenage children, taught in school to think independently, clash with Indian parents who demand unquestioning obedience.

conflict resolution

- ✓ In general Indians are assertive and outspoken.
- ✓ Religion usually does not play a role in resolving conflicts about health matters. Generally Indians listen to the physician.
- ✓ Where there is a disagreement, it might be necessary to bring in an unbiased third party or to back up one's position with a publication.

gestures

- ✓ A western woman should not initiate a handshake with a man. Many Indian women will share a handshake with a foreign woman, but not a man.
- ✓ To express remorse or honesty the Indian people will grasp their earlobes.
- ✓ Pointing is to be done with a chin or a full hand - fingers are used only with children and prisoners and can be considered offensive.
- ✓ Elders in India are never addressed by their first name.

personal and cultural traditions

- ✓ Indian Americans are afraid that their traditions will be lost unless vigorous efforts are made to preserve them.
- ✓ At temples and mosques, Indian parents try to offer, through religious education and social and cultural activities, a viable alternative to excessive Westernization, which they equate with a permissive lifestyle.
- ✓ Unmarried and married women wear a bindi or a dot on their forehead as a cosmetic adornment. Widows aren't permitted to wear bindi, because they are not supposed to do anything to look attractive.

treatment issues

medical treatment

- ✓ Doctors are seen as an authority figure, and he/she should be the one to deliver any bad news. It should be delivered to the family first or to the patient when the family is present.
- ✓ It may be beneficial to contact a family member when dealing with an older patient.
- ✓ Indians deal well with uncertainty, although they want any information regarding their well-being to be shared with them.
- ✓ Indian patients like to be well-attended and treated with respect and courtesy.

emotions

- ✓ Absolute reverence for life, or ahimsa, is fundamental to everyday experience of Hinduism.
- ✓ Generally, most Indians are calm and dignified in any situation.

food

- ✓ Foods prepared at the religious functions are generally vegetarian.
- ✓ Meat and fish are widely eaten, but some communities are vegetarian, especially Hindus and Jains. Most Hindus avoid beef, because the cow is a sacred animal to them, and Muslims avoid eating pork.
- ✓ Jains, who have very strict dietary laws, avoid eating even root vegetables, because it violates their belief in non-violence against even the smallest creature on earth.

death

- ✓ The basic rituals to commemorate death vary upon tradition. Please take into account any request the family might have.
- ✓ Hindus believe that humanity is cast into a long cycle of repetitive incarnation, known as samsara. Everyday life, our day-to-day experience of existence is seen as a burden, very often a painful one, thanks to the working-out of karma from our current life and past incarnations. This process is seen as an intrinsic part of the human condition.

did you know



? Most Indians speak English fluently, but they also speak their native language. India has 15 major languages and 844 different dialects with most of the major languages represented in the Chicago area.

g l o s s a r y word	meaning
Ha	Yes
Nahi	No
Dhanyavaad	Thank you
Aapakaa svaagat hai	You're welcome
kRipyaa	Please
Shamma Kare	Excuse me
Namaste	Hello
Alavidha	Goodbye
Aapka naam kyahai?	What is your name?
Achchhay	Good
Buray	Bad
Mataji	Mother
Pitaji	Father
Jyaadaa	A lot
Paani	Water

important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year	January 1	Marks the first day of the New Year.
Republic Day	January 26	Celebration of the establishment of the new Republic of India.
Indian Independence Day	August 15	Celebrates Indian Independence from colonial rule.
Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday	October 2	Celebrates the birth of this illustrious Indian leader.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

Sources

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