



Healthy Living

Latina Girls & Overweight: Key Facts

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, obesity is now the *most chronic health problem* among American children. Over the past 25 years, the percentage of overweight girls has more than doubled. Poor and minority girls have the highest rates of childhood obesity.

- ◆ Latina girls are the second most overweight group of children in the U.S., potentially increasing future health risks.¹
- ◆ When compared to the general population, Latino, African-American and Native-American children are disproportionately affected by obesity. Among girls the highest prevalence of obesity is found among African-American and Hispanic girls.²
- ◆ Mexican-American (23 percent) and Non-Hispanic black (21 percent) adolescents ages 12–19 are more likely to be overweight than non-Hispanic White adolescents (14 percent).³
- ◆ Mexican-American children ages 6–11 are more likely to be overweight (22 percent) than non-Hispanic black children (20 percent) and non-Hispanic White children (14 percent).⁴

Being overweight puts girls at risk for other chronic health problems like Type II diabetes, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, hypertension, and arthritis—diseases that used to be diagnosed almost exclusively in adults. The high rates of poverty and lack of access to proper health coverage exacerbates the risks of these chronic health problems.

- ◆ The higher prevalence of obesity among Mexican-American and Puerto Rican children appears to start as early as six to seven years of age and is seen throughout adolescence and adulthood.⁵
- ◆ The prevalence of Type II diabetes among Latinos is two to three times greater than that found among non-Hispanic Whites. Young people of Mexican descent experience a particularly high rate.⁶
- ◆ Thirty percent of all Latino children (approximately 4 million) live in poverty.⁷
- ◆ One-third (34.7%) of all uninsured children under age 18 are Latino. Yet Latinos comprise only 18 percent of all children under age 18.⁸

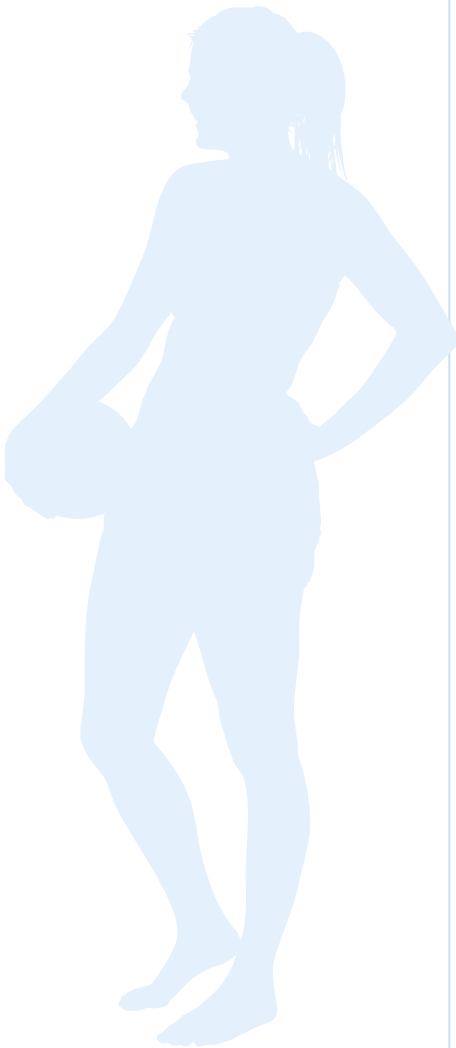


Acculturation may increase vulnerability in girls. For Latinas and other groups, acculturation can have a negative impact on food consumption, eating habits, and body image.

- ◆ Latina and Asian-American adolescents born in the U.S. to immigrant parents are more than twice as likely to be overweight as foreign-born adolescents who move to the U.S.⁹
- ◆ Second and third generation Latino adolescents are more likely to be obese than their first generation peers.¹⁰
- ◆ Acculturated Latinos eat more fried foods and less fruit, and Latinos of low socioeconomic status have few low-fat dietary practices.¹¹
- ◆ Heaviness is seen as a sign of affluence and success in some traditional Latino cultures; but as Latinas acculturate to the standards of beauty in this country, they may seek to achieve thinner bodies.¹²
- ◆ Latina women born in the U.S. are more likely to prefer a smaller body size. Those who immigrate after age 17 are less likely to desire a thin body.¹³

American children and adolescents today are less physically active as a group than previous generations. Lack of physical activity, in school and out of school, has contributed to the obesity problem for Latina girls and women.

- ◆ American children and adolescents today are more likely to be overweight and to have higher blood pressure, insulin and cholesterol concentrations.¹⁴
- ◆ Nationally, about 36 percent of Hispanic sophomore girls played interscholastic sports, compared with 52 percent of non-Hispanics for the 2001–02 school year, according to U.S. Department of Education survey data.¹⁵
- ◆ Hispanic girls from high-income homes lag behind non-Hispanic peers in sports and athletic activity participation.¹⁶
- ◆ Nearly 60 percent of Latina adults are physically inactive—they do no spare-time physical activity.¹⁷



- ¹ Flores, G., Fuentes-Afflick, E. et al. "The Health of Latino Children: Urgent Priorities, Unanswered Questions, and a Research Agenda." *Journal of the American Medical Association*; 288(1); 82–90. July 3, 2002.
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *Prevalence of Overweight Among Children and Adolescents: United States, 1999–2002*. October 2004. Ogden C. et al. "Prevalence and Trends in Overweight Among US Children and Adolescents, 1999–2000." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 288(14). October 9, 2002.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Mendoza, F. "The Health of Latino Children in the United States," *Critical Health Issues for Children and Youth, The Future of Children*, Vol. 4, No. 3. Winter 1994.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ United States Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey (released in September 2004). Table POV01: Age and Sex of All People, Family Members and Unrelated Individuals Iterated by Income-to-Poverty Ratio and Race: 2003.
- ⁸ United States Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey (released in September 2004). Table HI08: Health Insurance Coverage Status and Type of coverage by Selected Characteristics for Children Under 18: 2003. http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032004/health/h08_000.htm.
- ⁹ "Obesity in Youth." AOA Fact Sheets. American Obesity Association. Updated May 2005.
- ¹⁰ "Latina Girls." "Eating Disorders Information Sheet. *Body Wise Handbook*. Office on Women's Health. Updated October 2005.
- ¹¹ Foreyt, J. P. "Cultural competence in the prevention and treatment of obesity: Latino Americans." A Focus On Obesity. *The Permanente Journal*. 7(2). Spring 2003. Romero-Gwynn, E. and Gwynn, D. Dietary patterns and acculturation among Latinos of Mexican descent. *JSRI Research and Publications Institute Research Reports*. Julian Samora Research Institute. October 1997.
- ¹² See Note 10.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Committee on Nutrition, 2002–2003. Prevention of pediatric overweight and obesity. *Pediatrics*, 112(2): 424–430. August 2003.
- ¹⁵ Sylwester, M. "Culture, family play role in sports for Latina girls." Sports Section, *USA Today*. Updated March 29, 2005.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ "The Heart Truth for Latinas: An Action Plan." NIH Publication No. 03–5065. National Institutes of Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 2003.

