

U.S.-Born Latinos More Vulnerable to Chronic Diseases Than Foreign-Born Peers

Consuming a Westernized diet for longer could contribute to the development of chronic diseases.

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New research suggests that Latino people born in the United States may be more susceptible to multiple chronic diseases compared with Latinos born elsewhere.

The [findings](#), presented at the American Heart Association's (AHA) Epidemiology, Prevention, Lifestyle and Cardiometabolic Health conference, suggest that Latinos born in the United States have higher levels of metabolites associated with [diabetes](#), [obesity](#), [asthma](#) and [chronic kidney disease](#), compared with first-generation Latino people born elsewhere.

Study coauthor Yang Li, a researcher at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, said foreign-born Latinos living in the United States are more likely to develop conditions linked to [diet](#), lifestyle and environmental factors the longer they stay in the country.

"The difference of metabolic status between U.S.-born Latinos and non-U.S.-born Latinos is mainly driven by Westernized food," Li said in an [AHA news article](#). "In terms of individual risk factors, changing food patterns should be paid the first attention."

According to the [2020 Census](#), more than 62 million Latinos live in the United States, accounting for 18.7% of the total U.S. population. For this study, researchers utilized data from the [Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos](#), the largest and most representative study of people with cultural roots spanning Latin America and the Caribbean. They analyzed the by-products after the body breaks down substances known as metabolites from 7,119 Latino individuals.

By looking at a person's metabolomic profile, researchers can examine measurable factors that contribute to how healthy an individual is as well as the likelihood that they will develop chronic conditions in the future.

Researchers followed up with participants six years after blood was collected and found that Latinos in the United States had higher levels of metabolites associated with a 22% higher risk of

diabetes, 42% higher risk of asthma, 16% higher risk of severe obesity and 15% higher risk of chronic kidney disease.

Monik Jiménez, ScD, an epidemiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School, told AHA that this area of work "helps us to understand how the human body is sort of manifesting changes to the social environment and changes to nutrition, changes to stress, differences in social experiences between people who are staying in their home countries versus those who are in the U.S. and across generations."

"What people eat is very important, and that's one of the things we know can change quite dramatically based on time in the United States and increased consumption of Westernized diet, like processed foods," Jiménez continued.

Li emphasizes the importance of healthy eating and incorporating plant-based foods, such as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains into one's diet to combat the unhealthy qualities of a Western diet.