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The Program for Multicultural Health staff includes specialists in:

- Diet/Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Cultural Competency
- Community Health Education
- Nursing
- Social Work

## African American Women and Obesity

Obesity has reached epidemic status in the United States. African American women represent a cultural group with high rates of obesity. High blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease are all linked to obesity.

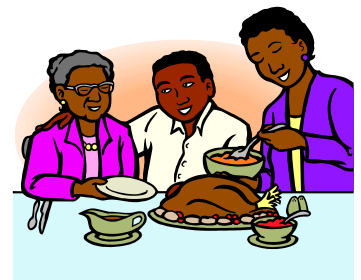
There are many suggested reasons for the high rates of obesity among African American women. One is the acceptance of the large sizes among African American women. This acceptance dates back to the American slave era. In West Africa, full figured women were seen as a symbol of health, wealth, prosperity and fertility.

Many foods given to African Americans during slavery were the less desirable parts of animals.

These foods were also high in fat. Items such as pig's feet, neck and intestines became basic staples in the early African American diet. Many foods were creatively prepared by the slaves to make them more edible and have evolved into today's "Soul Food."

Traditional foods represent a common cultural identity which can help one deal with fear, rage, grief and disappointment. This link between food and the cultural identity sometimes explains the difficulty in changing eating habits.

The decision of African Americans to change their eating habits is a testimony that they acknowledge the decision making power that they now have over food



Traditional foods also represent a common cultural identity

choices. Exercising this control becomes a way to honor and recognize their ancestors' and their lack of control over their food choices.

Sources: Villarosa, L. (Ed.). (1994). *Body & Soul: The Black women's guide to physical health and emotional well-being*. New York: Harper Collins.  
Thompson, Becky. 1992. *A Hunger So Wide and So Deep: A Multiracial View of Women's Eating Problems*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

## Muslims and Fasting

During the sacred Month of Ramadan Muslims traditionally abstain from food, drink and sexual activity from dawn to sunset.

At sunset, this fast is broken by drinking water, eating three dates, and

performing special taraweeh' prayers after the daily night prayer.

Fasting serves various purposes: while hungry and thirsty, Muslims are reminded of the suffering and poor; while abstaining from sexual activity, the

body and mind are symbolically cleansed.

Under special conditions, Muslims can chose to postpone their fast.

Source: M. Amir Ali, Ph.D. The Institute of Islamic Information & Education Chicago, Illinois <http://www.islam-usa.com/ramdan.html>

# Latin Rhythm and Dance: An Aerobic Physical Activity

By Wasantha Young , Physical Activity Specialist



*Flamenco  
Spanish Dance*

## Health Benefits of physical activity specific to the Latino population

According to the Healthy People 2010 database, approximately 46% of adult Mexican Americans indicated they were physically active during leisure time. Physical activity reduces your risk for obesity, heart disease, cardiovascular disease and stroke. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for Latino/Hispanics. Therefore, the benefits of being physically active are numerous and life saving.

## Definition of aerobic physical activity

Aerobic physical activity utilizes large muscle groups in the legs or arms and shoulders continuously for a period of 15 to 20 minutes (minimum). Over a period of time, aerobic physical activity will strengthen the heart and increase the heart's ability to supply oxygen and blood to the muscles. Aerobic physical activity can be found in the dance movements of the Latino/Hispanic culture.

## Rhythm and Movement

For the young and old, one of the most passionate and popular low to high-intensity aerobic physical activity in the Latino/Hispanic community is dancing. Rhythms and dance styles are Merengue and Bachata; Rumba and Salsa; and Cumbia. Respectively, these rhythmic styles are local to the Dominican Republic; Cuba and Puerto Rico; and Colombia. Punta is a dance style created in Honduras that is also widely performed at gatherings. Reggaeton, a combination of Merengue and Reggae, is dance style frequently preferred by the younger crowd. It is high impact and very sensuous.

Source: American Heart Association 2001, National Health & Nutrition Examination Survey 1988-1994, Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise.

## Latin Rhythms

Not only does dance often occur during gatherings, there are many opportunities in the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti areas to engage in Latino/Hispanic dance. Often at private and family gatherings, Latinos/Hispanics engage in dance. There are also social and private dance clubs advertising Latino/Hispanic dance. Below are some of my Latino music favorites:

1. **Celia Cruz** – Salsa
2. **Los Van Van** – Salsa
3. **Salsa Explosion** – Salsa
4. **Olga Tanon** – Merengue, Bachata
5. **Dark Latin Groove** – Salsa
6. **Putamayo Series** – Various Dance Styles
7. **El Son No Ha Muerto** – Salsa
8. **Juan Luis Guerra** – Bachata, Merengue
9. **Elvis Crespo** – Merengue
10. **Oscar DeLeon** - Salsa



Dance, in any culture, is a wonderful way to increase levels of physical activity

Dance, in any culture, is a wonderful way to increase levels of physical activity. For me, Latino/Hispanic dance has also offered an expansion of social and cultural learning. I admit, when I am twirled, I still get my footing mixed up, but it's still a blast!

The benefits of being physically active are numerous and life saving

## Jewish Holidays, Rituals Food Customs and Celebrations

By: Bertha Aycock, Registered Dietitian

Holidays are a significant part of all religions, and food plays a significant role in the observances. The Jewish religion has a long history of table- and family-centered holiday celebrations. Throughout the year holidays are celebrated with foods symbolic to that occasion. Certain events in Jewish life such as Bar Mitzvahs and weddings are also celebrated with particular symbolic foods. Below are some of the important holidays.

- **Sabbath** is the most important day of the week. No food or preparation of food is cooked or reheated. It begins on Friday and ends on Saturday at sundown, so all foods eaten on the Sabbath must be made prior to sundown on Friday evening.
- **Rosh Hashanah**, marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year. This is another high holy day that takes place in the fall. It is a time for family gathering and eating. One custom is to offer a "sweet" on the table. Some traditional foods representing optimism and a "sweet" future are honey, raisins, carrots, and apples.
- **Yom Kippur** is reportedly the most important holiday of the Jewish year. The name "Yom Kippur" means "Day of Atonement", it is a day set aside to atone for the sins of the past year. This day of fasting begins at sundown on the eve of the holiday and ends at sundown the next day. The traditional meal served on the eve of the holiday is similar to meals served on Rosh Hashanah. The exception is that foods are eaten before the fast to prevent excessive thirst while fasting. At sunset of the day of Yom Kippur families and friends gather to "break the fast" with a brunch-type-meal. A dairy-oriented meal is common. For Ashkenazic Jews this meal typically contains bagels, noodle kugel, eggs, smoked salmon and other smoked fish, herring, fruits, and light cakes.
- **Sukkoth** is another holiday that marks the gathering of the harvest and the commencement of autumn. It is traditional to build a little booth or hut (called a sukkah) outside, a synagogue, in the backyard, or on a porch. Fruits are usually consumed on this day and children are often given little bags of fruits at religious schools.
- **Hanukkah**, know as the "festival of lights" is celebrated in early December. Hanukkah means "dedication," and it commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after its desecration by foreign forces. It is reportedly not as significant a holiday as the Jewish New Year or Passover, Potato latkes, potato kugel, and a wide variety of sweets are traditional Hanukkah foods.
- **Passover, or Pesach** is a 8 day observance commemorating the freedom and exodus of the Israelites (Jewish slaves) from Egypt during the reign of the Pharaoh Ramses II. No leavened bread products may be consumed. Potato starch and matzoth meal or matzoth are frequently used as substitutes in food preparation. Those who strictly observe Passover will remove all foods from the house that are not allowed. In addition, they use separate sets of dishes, pots, pans and utensils during the holiday.

The first two nights of Passover are the most significant and are observed with a festive meal, or Seder (meaning order).

Other holidays have traditional foods and festive meals, but only the reportedly more important holidays have been discussed at this time.

Source: The American Dietetic Association



The Jewish religion has a long history of table- and family-centered holiday celebrations

Throughout the year holidays are celebrated with foods symbolic to that occasion



Holidays have traditional foods and festive meals

## Live a Long and Healthy Life



**Hara hachi bu  
means eat until 80  
percent full only**

A 25 year study in Okinawa, Japan, showed that the key to a long and healthy life comes down to quality nutrition, physical activity and a strong support network.

The people of Okinawa are said to be one of the ethnicities with the longest and healthiest life expectancy in the world. They are the least likely to suffer from heart disease, stroke, or cancer, and 97 per cent of their life expectancy is disability-free. The study also showed that Okinawans who had grown up in other countries with a different lifestyle tended to have a earlier death rate.

### How do they do it?

- A low-calorie diet that includes, vegetables, whole grains, soy and fish.
- Okinawans follow three principles: kuten gwa ("little portions"), hara hachi bu (eat until 80 percent full only) and nuchi gusui (eating as though food had healing power).
- Regular physical activity: Tai Chi, dance, walking and physical labor.
- Moderate alcohol use
- Strong social and family networks and spiritual beliefs that foster a sense of well being.

Source: Evidence-based Extreme Longevity: The Case of Okinawa, Japan B. J. Willcox, D.C. Willcox, M. Suzuki.