



## Doctor-Patient Relationships: Top 10 things to know about Latino patients

While it's never wise to assume that all individuals with a similar cultural background act the same way, the following list offers some suggestions that may help you communicate more clearly with your Latino patients and offer them more compassionate care.

Recent immigrants are more likely to follow Latino patterns than are second- or third-generation Latinos.

1. When visiting the doctor, it is customary to bring along a relative for moral support.  
*If possible, ask your patient if their accompanying relative would like to come into the examining room with them. This might make the patient feel more supported and comfortable.*
2. Formalities, such as shaking hands, are important, even in a medical setting.  
*Take the time to shake your patient's hand and allow for proper introductions. This will make your patient feel much more at ease.*
3. Small talk, such as inquiring about relatives, is customary and considered polite.  
*Asking about your patient's family is a good way to break the ice and get the patient comfortable enough to speak about the reason for their visit. In Latin American cultures, getting 'straight to the point' is often considered curt and rude.*
4. Out of respect, doctors are not generally questioned.  
*Latino patients generally do not second-guess a suggested treatment in fear it may offend the doctor or reveal that they don't understand it. Take the time to explain and repeat the reason for your treatment suggestions and answer commonly asked questions, even if the patient seems to have no questions to ask.*
5. Diagnosing one's own ailments and attempting a home remedy are very common.



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6. Adults tend to delay seeking medical care when feeling ill; children, on the other hand, are generally rushed to the hospital with even minor signs of illness.

*If a Latino patient comes to see you it is because the symptoms have probably escalated to the point where home remedies no longer offer a cure.*

7. Many Latino patients feel that if the doctor has not prescribed any medication, he or she has not really "treated" the patient's illness.

We are not suggesting you prescribe unnecessary medication. However, if your patient does not need medication, you may want to take a few minutes to explain why. You might also consider 'prescribing' healthy foods.

8. Documentation, such as discharge papers and follow up care instructions, will more likely be read if they are in your patient's mother tongue.

*If you notice your patient is not fluent in English, we suggest you arrange for any important documentation to be translated to Spanish. This extra service will promote your patient following your treatment suggestions as well as creating an atmosphere of understanding.*

9. Pain is often ignored or tolerated without expressing obvious signs of discomfort.

*Latinos tend not to ask for pain medication. The culture stresses that admitting pain makes one vulnerable. This is especially true for men. If you feel that a patient needs pain medication, explain that it is part of your overall treatment plan and is intended to make your patient heal faster.*

10. Latinos will often get an antibiotic shot when coming down with a cold.

*(See # 5) In Latin America, many medications do not require a prescription. For minor ailments, people tend to go to their local pharmacy and get a prescription directly from the pharmacist. The use of antibiotics is very common when treating the flu.*

*The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons offers these additional tips:*

Be aware of traditional gender roles. Men are generally the authority figures, and women are the homemakers. Practice pronouncing the patient's name correctly. Smile and look directly at the patient. Greet patients formally and speak Spanish whenever possible.