Dietary Patterns and Acculturation Among Latinos of Mexican Descent

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ABSTRACT

The diet of Latinos living in the United States is influenced by the dietary traditions of individual countries, availability of native foods in U.S. food stores, new dietary practices adopted in the U.S., as well as length of residency of in the U.S. This paper describes dietary patterns and selected health conditions among people of Mexican descent in California. Sources of information include literature searches and data from a study conducted among women of Mexican descent living in five California counties. The study investigated the degree of retention and/or abandonment of traditional Mexican dietary practices and adoption of new ones in the U.S. Participants included 165 Mexican-born women who had migrated as adults to the U.S. A second group consisted of 101 first-generation Mexican-American women born and reared in the U.S. Women in this study were low-income, with an average age of 34 years, and an average education of seven years. Frequency of food consumption before and after immigration, and frequency of food consumption among Mexican-Americans were assessed. Over 160 traditional Mexican foods and foods of the “typical” U.S. diet were included in the research instrument. Prevalence of obesity and diabetes as well as participants’ awareness of preventive measures were assessed. The study identified different levels of dietary acculturation among the two groups. These reflect a decline in the consumption of traditional foods, new ways of utilizing traditional foods and, above all, the adoption of new foods. Overall, there were some healthful and some significantly less healthful dietary changes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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