

Nearly half of Hispanics unaware they have high cholesterol; less than a third treated

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Nearly half of Hispanic adults were unaware they have high cholesterol, and less than a third receive any kind of cholesterol treatment, in a new study in *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

Hispanics are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in America, with 52 million among the U.S. population, yet their awareness and management of high cholesterol lags behind other ethnic groups. Educating Hispanics/Latinos about the importance of maintaining healthy cholesterol levels could have a significant [public health](#) impact on reducing the burden of heart disease in America.

Researchers reviewed data from 16,415 Hispanics, between 18 to 75 years of age, who participated in the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos. They found:

- 49.3 percent of Hispanics were not aware that they had [high cholesterol levels](#). Of those who were aware, only 29.5 percent received treatment.
- High cholesterol was more common among men than women, 44 percent versus 40.5 percent. However, men had lower rates of [cholesterol treatment](#) compared with women, 28.1 percent versus 30.6 percent.
- 40 percent of participants were obese, 25 percent had high blood pressure and 17 percent had diabetes, all risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Participants with these conditions were more likely to be aware that they had high cholesterol.

- Younger adults, women, the uninsured, those with lower income, and more recent immigrants were less likely to have their high cholesterol controlled.
- Hispanics born in the United States were more likely to be unaware of their high cholesterol compared with foreign-born Hispanics, however, longer U.S. residency was associated with cholesterol awareness, treatment and control.

"Many Hispanics have high cholesterol, approximately 45 percent, probably due to a mix of genes and diet," said Carlos J. Rodriguez, M.D., M.P.H., study lead author and an associate professor of medicine and epidemiology at Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston Salem, North Carolina.

"What's more surprising is the lack of awareness, treatment and control. That needs to change since awareness is the first step in prevention," he said.

In this study, treatment was effective in 64 percent of those treated, indicating that awareness and management can work in lowering cholesterol levels.

Addressing these gaps is critical to reducing Hispanic/Latinos' risks for high [cholesterol](#), heart disease and heart attack and improving overall public health.

"Lack of awareness is a problem with roots at different levels in Hispanics: access to care and patient/provider difficulties such as language barriers or cultural insensitivity may further contribute to these gaps," Carlos said.

The American Heart Association's 2020 Impact goal is to improve cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing

deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent. Improving [cholesterol levels](#) among all Americans is a critical component to reaching the goal.

"Heart disease remains an equal opportunity threat to the health of everyone; no person is immune. If we are to continue our record of success in reducing the burden of heart disease, we will need to broaden our target for risk factor reduction," said American Heart Association spokesperson Clyde W. Yancy, M.D., chief of cardiology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine and a former AHA president.

"We cannot rest on our triumphs as nearly 50 percent of those Latino Americans with [high cholesterol](#) are unaware of the presence of this risk factor for [heart disease](#) and thus remain exposed to an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. We should consider this as an unacceptable burden of risk and consider public health policies, community awareness and a redoubled focus on prevention in all communities at risk."

Provided by American Heart Association

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