

# Alcohol and the Hispanic Community

Hispanics are the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic group in the United States, making up about 16 percent of the population, or more than 50 million people. Research shows that drinking patterns among Hispanics are different from those of non-Hispanic Whites and other ethnic or racial groups. Understanding these differences can help prevention, intervention, and treatment programs better serve the Hispanic community.



## How much do Hispanics drink?

Overall, Hispanics are less likely to drink at all than are non-Hispanic Whites. In fact, Hispanics have high rates of abstinence from alcohol. But Hispanics who choose to drink are more likely to consume higher volumes of alcohol than non-Hispanic Whites.

**Selected alcohol consumption statistics for women and men:  
U.S. adults 18 years of age and older**

	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic
% who had at least 1 drink in the past year	69.5	59.9
% who had at least 1 drink in their lifetime, but not in the past year	17.1	14.4
% who had at least 1 drink in their lifetime	86.6	74.3
% total lifetime abstainers (not even 1 drink)	13.4	25.7
% of past-year drinkers, by usual number of drinks consumed per drinking day:		
1	38.3	31.8
2	30.1	25.8
3+	31.6	42.4
% of past-year drinkers who drank 4+/5+ drinks:		
At least once in the past year	36.8	41.9
Less than once a month (1 to 11 times in past year, or < monthly)	15.5	15.9
Monthly or more (12+ times in past year)	21.3	26.0

SOURCE: NESARC, Wave 1, data collected during 2001–2002.

## What is “binge drinking?”

Binge drinking means drinking so much within about 2 hours that blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels reach 0.08g/dL. For women, this usually occurs after about 4 drinks, and for men, after about 5.

Drinking this way can pose health and safety risks, including car crashes and injuries.

Over the long term, binge drinking damages the liver and other organs.



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## What factors predict drinking behavior in the Hispanic community?

### Acculturation

Acculturation is the process of adapting to the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a new culture. A critical factor in predicting drinking patterns in the Hispanic community is level of acculturation.

Living and working in the United States, raising families here, speaking English, and above all, getting an American education all contribute to adapting to American culture. But as acculturation levels increase, so can alcohol consumption. The evidence is clear that as women become acculturated to American life, they tend to drink more alcohol. There is mixed evidence of the same effect for men.

### Gender

In traditional Hispanic culture, women typically do not drink alcohol outside of small family gatherings or other private settings. For Hispanics in the United States, though, this cultural norm is changing. Recent evidence shows some young Hispanic women are drinking as much or even more than young Hispanic men.

### Attitudes

Research shows that young, U.S.-born Hispanic men who are not Protestant tend to have relaxed attitudes toward drinking. Those who feel this way also are more likely to drink, to drink heavily, and to possibly have alcohol-related problems. Within the Hispanic community, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans tend to have more relaxed attitudes about drinking than Cuban Americans.

### Drinking trends by country of national origin

Trends in drinking among Hispanics vary by country of origin. Among men, Puerto Ricans tend to drink the most and Cubans the least. Among women, Puerto Ricans tend to drink the most and Mexicans the least. Across all Hispanic national groups, beer is the preferred beverage, followed by wine and then liquor.

Average number of drinks per week (beer, wine, and liquor) by country/nation of origin		
Country/Nation of Origin	Average Number of Drinks/Week for Men (irrespective of beverage)	Average Number of Drinks/Week for Women (irrespective of beverage)
Puerto Rico	16.9 (±1.6)	9.5 (±2.3)
Mexico	15.9 (±1.7)	3.0 (±1.0)
South/Central America	8.9 (±0.8)	3.8 (±0.6)
Cuba	8.4 (±0.9)	3.4 (±1.1)
Percent of past-year drinkers who binge drink by country/nation of origin		
Country/Nation of Origin	% of drinking men who binge drink	% of drinking women who binge drink
Puerto Rico	48.6	51.1
Mexico	46.2	26.1
South/Central America	42.9	27.3
Cuba	27.3	22.4

SOURCE: Ramisetty-Mikler, S.; Caetano, R.; and Rodriguez, L.A. The Hispanic Americans Baseline Alcohol Survey (HABLAS): Alcohol consumption and sociodemographic predictors across Hispanic national groups. *Journal of Substance Use* 15(6): 402-416, 2010.

### How much is too much?

A standard drink is roughly 14 grams of pure alcohol, which is found in:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits

The USDA defines moderate drinking as:

- Up to 1 drink per day for women
- Up to 2 drinks per day for men



## Consequences of heavy drinking

### Alcohol dependence

About 9.5 percent of Hispanics will have alcohol dependence at some point in their lives, as compared with about 13.8 percent of non-Hispanic Whites. But 33 percent of Hispanics who become alcohol dependent have recurrent or persistent problems compared with 22.8 percent of non-Hispanic Whites.

**Within the Hispanic community, rates of alcohol dependence vary by country or nation of origin**

Country/Nation of Origin	Rate of Alcohol Dependence (Percent)
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>South/Central America</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Cuba</b>	<b>2.4</b>

SOURCE: Chartier, K. and Caetano, R., Ethnicity and health disparities in alcohol research, *Alcohol Research & Health*, Vol. 33, Nos. 1 and 2, 2010, p. 154.

### Drunk driving

Among Hispanics who drink, Mexican American men and women and South/Central American men are most likely to receive a citation for driving under the influence of alcohol. Research shows that between 1992 and 2002, there was a decrease in the number of Hispanic men (ages 18–29) who received a DUI, but an increase in the number of Hispanic women (ages 18–29) who received this citation.

### Liver disease

In general, Hispanic men develop liver disease at high rates. In fact, White Hispanic men have the highest rates of alcohol-related cirrhosis, a serious liver disease, of all ethnic or racial groups. But, Black Hispanic men (e.g., from the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic, or Cuba) have the lowest cirrhosis rates when compared with non-Hispanic Whites.

## What is alcohol dependence?

Alcohol dependence is an alcohol use disorder often characterized by:

- Craving or compulsion to drink
- Increased tolerance to alcohol
- Withdrawal symptoms, including shaking, anxiety, or even seizures
- Failed attempts to quit that can result in drinking even greater amounts



## Do Hispanics seek treatment for alcohol problems?

About 8.3 percent of Hispanics in the United States needed treatment for alcohol problems in the past year (data collected between 2002 and 2007). Of those in need, about 7.7 percent received treatment in a special facility.

Limited research shows that treatment can help Hispanics who speak English and who are highly acculturated to American life. Nevertheless, Hispanics with severe alcohol problems are less likely than non-Hispanic Whites to seek the treatment they need. Hispanics also are less likely to join Alcoholics Anonymous, even though AA groups are available for free and in Spanish.

### Within the Hispanic community, the need for treatment varies by country or nation of origin

Country/Nation of Origin	Need for Alcohol Use Treatment (Percent)
Mexico	9.2
Puerto Rico	7.7
South/Central America	6.8
Cuba	5.2

SOURCE: National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), Substance use treatment need and receipt among hispanics, <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k9/164/Hispanics.htm>.

## At Risk

NIAAA defines how much drinking may put people at risk for developing alcohol dependence.

Low risk drinking limits are:

### Women:

No more than 7 drinks per week and no more than 3 drinks on any single day.

### Men:

No more than 14 drinks per week and no more than 4 drinks on any single day.

**To stay low risk, you must keep within both the single-day and weekly limits.**

Low risk does not mean no risk. Even within these limits, you can have problems if you drink too quickly or have other health issues. Drinking slowly, and making sure you eat enough while drinking, can help minimize alcohol's effects.



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For more information please visit:

[www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/](http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/)