

Understanding diabetes risk among Latinos in eastern North Carolina: perceptions regarding nutrition and physical activity

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Diabetes currently represents an urgent health problem among Latinos. The National Alliance for Hispanic Health estimates that one in ten Hispanics in the United States is living with diabetes, although only one in three may know he/she has the disease. Explaining Latinos' vulnerability to diabetes and confronting the factors that increase disease risk depend on understanding complex interactions among biological, cultural, and behavioral factors. Previous research has suggested that high rates of diabetes are related to cultural values, lifestyle, and inadequate access to information and healthcare. This paper explores how these issues specifically impact diet and physical activity among Latino migrants in eastern North Carolina. Nutrition and activity levels deserve special attention because of their impact on health status and diabetes risk. Data were collected during focus group discussions and individual interviews with men and women in the Latino community of Greenville, North Carolina. Participants provided information about patterns of physical activity and diet, factors that influence these patterns, and perceptions about their relevance for diabetes risk and general health. They were also asked about changes in their daily lives since migrating to the United States, including differences in access to healthy food and opportunities for regular physical activity. The results of this exploratory study have important applied dimensions for designing diabetes education and prevention programs. Community health initiatives must use culturally appropriate strategies that address the specific problems that Latinos experience in order to successfully prevent and treat diabetes.