

# Latinas, Cancer and Healthy Lifestyles

14 NOVEMBER / 2018



Lately, we've been talking about what researchers call the [Latino Health Paradox](#). The mystery of Latino longevity that shows that, a pesar de todo, in spite of all the odds, such as low education, low income, and low access to health care, Latinos still live longer than anyone else in the U.S.

## **That is good news, Comadres!**

But even though we live longer than most people in the U.S., we are not protected from obesity, heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. We hear a lot about diabetes in our community, but not that much about cancer, and cancer is a doozy.

Cancer and the Latino community is a very complex topic, but it's one we think is important for you and your comunidad to understand. (Hint: Prevention and early detection!)

According to the American Cancer Society 2018-2020 report, Latinos and Latinas are less likely to be diagnosed with cancer than non-Latino whites overall, but cancer is the leading cause of death among Latinos. (Go figure!)

There are several reasons for this confusing fact. One reason may be that incidence of cancer is

just lower among Latinos, which would be very good news, indeed. But another reason might be that Latinos get diagnosed in later stages of cancer when it is too late to cure it. And that is tragic news, Comadres, because many cancers are curable if we catch them early enough.

Another blow to the cancer dilemma among Latinos is that many of us don't have access to health care. Some simply don't have the resources to treat cancer when it happens. Many states have cancer early detection programs that are often free or low cost. In some states, there may even be low cost treatment options, but being low income and not having health care is still a huge challenge and one that we need to address. (a discussion for another day).

**We have prepared an overview of the cancers that Latinas need to pay extra attention to, and some steps to take to take care of yourself:**

## **Breast Cancer**

Breast cancer is lower among Latinas than non-Latinas in the U.S., but breast cancer is still the leading cause of death among Latinas.

The reason why: breast cancer in Latinas is often found in the advanced stages when it is harder to cure. Latinas don't get mammograms at the same rate as non-Latina whites. Some of our comadres can't afford it, but some of them just don't get mammograms. They're busy or they're embarrassed or they just don't want to deal with it, but they don't go and that does not end well.

Early detection of breast cancer saves lives.

### **What to do:**

- If you are 40 to 44, the American Cancer Society recommends that you start talking to your doctor about mammograms.
- If you are between the ages of 45 and 54, the American Cancer Society recommends a yearly mammogram.
- If you are over the age of 55, the American Cancer Society recommends a mammogram every two years.
- All women need to learn how to do self examine our breasts. Your health care provider can teach you how. Just ask!
- If you don't have insurance, there are breast cancer early detection programs in all states that can help you. Some programs may even have free or low cost treatment options.
- If you care about your comadres, moms, sisters, friends and madrinas, share this information with them. Offer to go with them to their mammograms. Go get coffee and dessert afterwards!

## **Colorectal Cancer**

Although colorectal cancer among Latinos is lower than among Non-Latino Whites, colorectal cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among Latinas and Latinos. Colorectal cancer is the 3rd leading cause of cancer deaths among Latinos.

Colorectal cancer is a very treatable cancer, if caught early.

Latinos and Latinas are squeamish when it comes to colorectal cancer screening. (¡Nos da asco!) Latinos undergo colorectal screening less than any other group. And the result of not getting screened is a tragedy that does not have to happen.

### **What to do:**

- The only way to catch colorectal cancer early is to make yourself go through the yukky tests! There are several tests that are commonly used to find colorectal cancer. None of them are fun or pleasant and many of us are just too embarrassed or grossed out to do them.
- There are 2 stool tests that are commonly used. They detect blood in the stool. You may know them as the FIT, which stands for fecal immunochemical test, or the FOBT, which stands for fecal occult blood test. (Basically it involves putting some poop on a card and sending it in for analysis. So, yes, fuchi, but effective, and it could save your life.)
- The other common test is the colonoscopy, which involves a tripa up your rear end. That's where the colon is. This falls into the category of ¡Ni modo! Grin and bear it. They give you a sedative to make you more comfortable and to help you forget it ever happened. Some people don't feel a thing. ¿What do you say we just get over the vergüenza and do the test, Comadres?
- Talk to your doctor about which colorectal cancer screening test is best for you, and preserve your long life!

## **Cervical Cancer**

According to the American Cancer Society, the cervical cancer rate among Latinas is 40% higher than among non-Latina white women. Although cervical cancer rates have gone down over the last few years, it is still too high for us, Comadres!

Cervical cancer is caused by certain kinds of viruses, called HPVs (the human papillomavirus). Sometimes the virus goes away on its own. But over time if HPV doesn't go away, it can cause cervical cancer.

### **What to do:**

- The main way to prevent HPV is to get the HPV vaccine. The CDC recommends that all children, boys and girls, get the vaccine between the ages of 13-17 so they can be protected for the rest of their lives.
- Recently, the HPV vaccine was approved by the Food and Drug Administration for people up to the age of 45. Check with your doctor and find out if you can get vaccinated.
- If you have HPV, the way to catch it before it becomes cancer is to have cervical cancer screening. It starts with a pap test and you may need an HPV test as well.
- Smoking puts us at risk of persistent HPV infections and cervical cancers. So if you don't smoke, don't start. If you smoke, quit.

## **Stomach Cancer**

Stomach cancer is higher among Latinas than non-Latina white women. Scientists don't have a full understanding of stomach cancer yet, but they have linked some stomach cancers to exposure to bacterial infections of the stomach. Some of these infections can be found and treated. More studies are needed to learn more about why Latinos and Latinas are at higher risk of stomach cancers.

### **What to do:**

- If you have had stomach bacterial infections, talk to your doctor about what you can do to protect yourself from stomach cancer.
- If you smoke, quit. If you don't smoke, don't start. (Seeing a theme here?)
- Cut down on drinking alcohol. It is recommended that women drink only one alcoholic drink a day.
- Avoid foods that are preserved with salt and limit your intake of smoked or charred foods.
- Cut down on processed meats, like bologna, chorizo, and ham
- Eat plenty of fruits and non-starchy vegetables like onions, garlic and leeks. There are studies that show these kinds of fruits and veggies can protect against stomach cancer.
- Follow good hygiene practices such as washing your hands after you go to the bathroom, washing fruits and veggies before you eat them, and being careful with how you store your food

## **Gallbladder Cancer**

Gallbladder cancer is higher among Latinas than among non-Latina whites. It is also higher among Latinas than in Latinos. More research is needed on gallbladder cancer and why it is so high among Latinas.

Possible connections are being overweight, being on hormone replacement therapy, and/or if you have had gallstones.

### **What to do:**

- Cut back on your risk for gallbladder cancer by getting to a healthier weight.
- If you are overweight, start eating a healthier diet and get more active.
- Join De Las Mías and follow our healthy living plan!
- If you are on hormone replacement therapy, talk to your doctor about this risk.

## **Summary**

We wanted to give you a snapshot of Latinas and cancer, so you can start thinking about it and take action!

There is good news about cancer:

- The American Cancer Society states that 42% of all cancer cases can be prevented, mainly by not smoking, eating healthfully and being physically active.

- Other cancers like breast, colon, and cervical cancer can be cured if you catch them early enough.
- Review this article with your familias. Take these specific steps and protect yourself and your hijas, comadres, tías, moms, and madrinas.
- If you are lucky enough to be able to sign up for health insurance, do it now. ¡Vale la pena!

For a deeper dive into Latinos and cancer, read the [American Cancer Society report](#): Cancer and Facts & Figures.

The take-away, Comadres, is this: All roads lead to following a healthy lifestyle program like De Las Mías.

Take back your power and hold on to the [Latina Health Paradox](#)! Get your cancer screenings and live to tell the tale! Take charge of your health and your life. You're driving, Comadre!

Let us know one thing you are doing today to change the cancer story for Latinas!

□

Check out the [De Las Mias app](#). It's free and ready for download in the Google Play Store. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram [@delasmiaslife](#).

---

#### Sources:

American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts and Figures for Hispanics/Latinos. 2018-2020. Atlanta, American Cancer Society, Inc. 2018.

<https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/cancer-facts-and-figures-for-hispanics-and-latinos/cancer-facts-and-figures-for-hispanics-and-latinos-2018-2020.pdf>

<https://www.fredhutch.org/en/events/cancer-in-our-communities/hispanic-americans-and-cancer.html>