



# Food Trauma in the Latino Community and Type 2 Diabetes

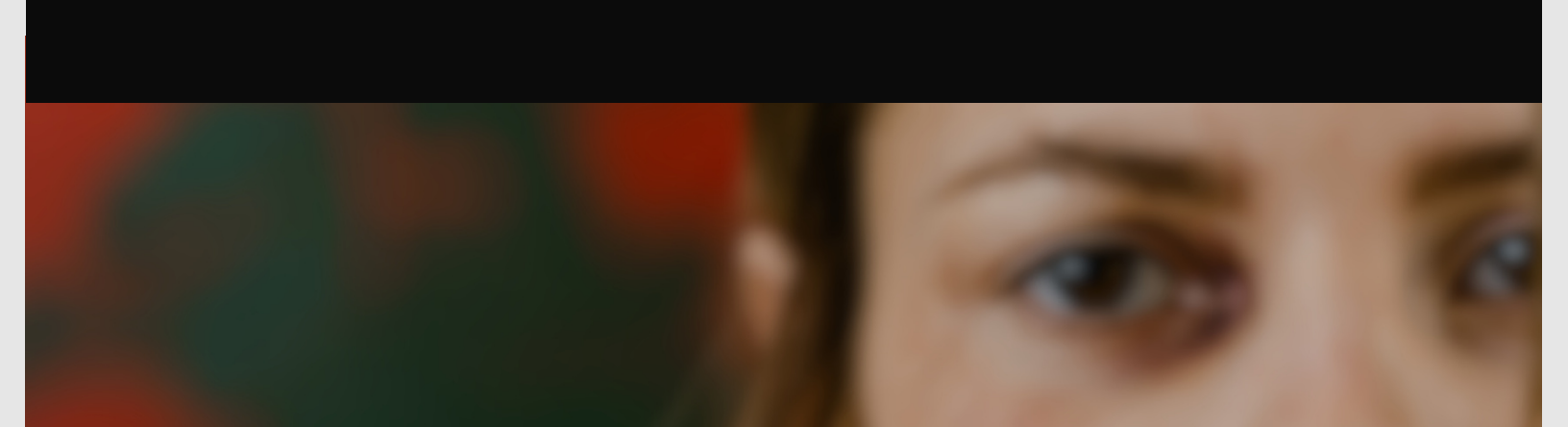
**By Aurora Ramos**

Around 38 million Americans have diabetes with a large majority of those having type 2 diabetes at all ages (Slupski, 2021). However, what is not often talked about is the connection between adverse childhood experiences, food insecurity, and cultural influences that increase the risk of type 2 diabetes. Similarly, what is not often discussed is how these types of experiences can create generational food habits which can contribute to the diagnosis of type 2 diabetes.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACES) according to Royer et al., (2022) are traumatizing events that occur in childhood that predict health and social outcomes across the lifespan. Some examples of these experiences could be forms of abuse, neglect, parental separation or divorce, family member-related mental health problems, substance abuse, incarceration, suicide,

and death which are especially higher amongst people of color (Royer et al., 2022). An association has been found between ACES and the occurrence of type 2 diabetes. Studies have shown that as the number of ACES increases so does the risk of type 2 diabetes (Huffhines, 2016). These experiences can also affect the mental health of these children growing up and can contribute to the diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Research has also actually found an increased risk for type 2 diabetes amongst veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD (Huffhines, 2016).

However, food insecurity is also an issue that can also indirectly increase the risk of type 2 diabetes. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) food insecurity is defined as, “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food (USDA, 2023).




”The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2022) states that lack of access to healthy foods is also a form of food insecurity. Food insecurity can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes and affect diabetes management for those who already have diabetes (CDC, 2022).

**“I eat four to five servings of food, because growing up, we did not have a refrigerator or stove and so, we had to eat all the food that prepared that evening. It could not go to waste and now as an adult, I feel that I have no choice but to continue to eat four servings or more per meal”.**

Regular access to food is an important basic need for a child’s physical, mental, and emotional development. Approximately 44 million people in the United States faced lack of food security of those reported almost 13 million identify as Latino (Feeding America, 2023). Last year in 2022 nearly 1 in 3 Latino children did not have reliable access to food (Feeding America, 2023).

The lack of access to food or lack of access to good quality foods can impact a child in many direct and indirect ways. In some low-income households' parents are on a budget and can only afford less expensive lower quality food with poorer nutrition (Thomas et al., 2019).

**“Food trauma is something that we do not think about when we hear the word “trauma”. Unfortunately, the more we are in the community, the more we hear stories that are painful and have left many in our community to suffer. The Rio Grande Valley is unique and, as we have stated before, rich in culture and traditions, which all revolve around food. During this time of the year many of us are socializing and spending time with others, which can lead to overeating and cause some added weight gain. We wanted to share a few comments that we have heard from community members this past year and we are purposely not including names out of respect for the individual as the stories/comments were hard for them to share. “**



Eating this type of diet can have overall health consequences over time. As well as creating the feeling of needing to eat as much as you can in case you do not have access to food again or because you do not know when your next meal will be (Abdurahman, 2019). Also feeling guilty for throwing food away because of the feeling that it is wasteful or “bad” to throw food away. Habits like these over time can increase risk of type 2 diabetes because of the poorer diet of low-quality foods and unhealthy eating habits that will cause an accumulation of visceral fat, and chronic disease outcomes such as type 2 diabetes (Abdurahman et al., 2019).

**“We did not know what we were poor, our family did not qualify for food stamps and my father was too proud to ask for assistance. Sometimes all we had to eat was potted meat with saltine crackers and that was for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I do not like to think about those times and now I tend to overindulge in eating”.**

As mentioned, it is very common for Latinos to experience food insecurity. This exemplifies that these types of generational food habits are quite common amongst the Latino community

It is important to spread awareness of these generational food habits to acknowledge their existence and then be able to address changing them to better the health of our community.

**“Finish all your food” was something I heard a lot from my mom growing up. Because we experienced food insecurity our faith in God to provide was how we remained hopeful during difficult times. It was engraved in me that throwing away food we had prayed over was to be ungrateful for the blessings we were granted. Thus, even though we may have felt full, finishing all our food was how we expressed gratitude not only for my mother preparing the meal but also for answered prayers. A lot of the meals consisted of high carbs like rice, fideo, potatoes, and pasta because it was the most filling and affordable. If we dared to be wasteful, the notorious “the starving children from Africa” lecture was guaranteed to arise. For me, this later developed into feeling guilty, anxious and difficulty practicing healthy portion control thus, overeating and led to one of the determinants of becoming obese.**