

1. Food beliefs

Hindu dietary practices can vary depending on the individual's beliefs and customs.

Most Hindus do not eat beef or pork and many follow a vegetarian diet. Fasting is common among Hindus, but there are no set rules and the decision to fast is up to the individual.

Many Hindus follow *Ayurvedic* dietary practices. Under this system certain foods are classified as *hot* or *cold* and can adversely or positively affect health conditions and emotions¹².

The classification of foods as *hot* or *cold* is unrelated to temperature. *Hot* foods are generally those foods which are salty, sour or high in animal protein, while *cold* foods are generally sweet or bitter⁴.

Some strict Hindus do not consume garlic or onion as the properties of these foods disturb spiritual practices such as meditation.

Refer to section three for a table of foods suitable for vegetarian Hindus.

2. Karma

- A central belief of Hinduism is the doctrine of *karma*, the law of cause and effect¹⁴.
- Hindus believe that every thought, word and action accumulates *karma*, which can affect current and future lives. Hindus believe in reincarnation¹⁴.
- Actions from a past life can affect events in the current life, including health and wellbeing¹⁴.
- Health care providers should be aware that a strong belief in *karma* can affect decision-making regarding health care.

3. Holy days

Hindus do not observe a specific day of worship, although some days of the week may be associated with particular deities.

Hindus do observe a number of holy days and festivals which can have an impact on health care due to associated fasts.

Most Hindu holy days are based on the lunar calendar and the dates can vary from year to year. Some festivals can occur over an extended period with celebrations lasting for days or weeks.

A religious calendar is published in the Queensland Health *Multicultural Clinical Support Resource*.
www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/support_tools/mcsr.asp

4. Fasting

Fasting is an integral part of Hinduism and is seen as a means of purifying the body and the soul, encouraging self-discipline, and gaining emotional balance⁷.

Fasting may be practiced on specific days of the week, during festivals or on holy days, or in conjunction with special prayers.

It is not considered obligatory for a Hindu patient to fast during hospitalisation. However, some patients may wish to fast while in hospital.

There is no specified way to fast, but individuals may choose to abstain completely from all food and drink or only abstain from certain foods.

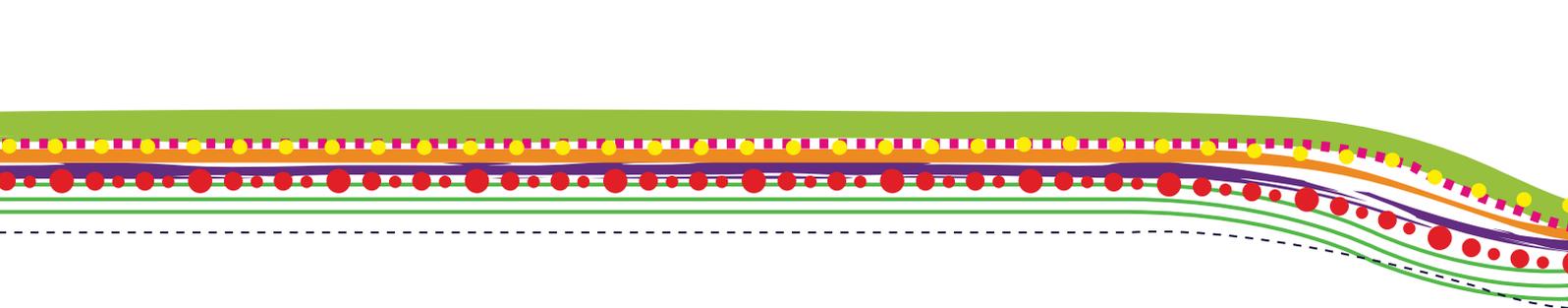
5. Dress

While there is no religious requirement for modest dress, many Hindus choose to dress modestly and may be reluctant to be examined by health care providers of the opposite sex.

Hindu women may wear a sacred thread or gold chain around their necks and Hindu men and boys may wear a sacred thread across the chest. These items should not be removed during examination. If it is necessary to remove an item, permission should be sought prior to removal¹⁵.

Hare Krishna followers, and some other Hindus, may wear sacred *tulsi* beads around the neck. If it is necessary to remove these beads, they should be retied around the wrist (preferably right).

In addition, some jewellery worn by Hindus may have a sacred meaning and patients should be consulted before removal.



6. Mental health and/or cognitive dysfunction

Hindus believe that all illnesses, whether physical or mental, have a biological, psychological and spiritual element. Treatments which do not address all three causes may not be considered effective by a Hindu patient¹⁰.

Many Hindus attach a stigma to mental illness and cognitive dysfunction.

Many Hindus have a strong belief in the concept of the *evil eye* and may believe this to be a cause of mental illness¹³.

In addition, all illness, including mental illness, may be seen as the result of *karma* from this, or a previous life.

Further information about mental health care for multicultural communities can be accessed through the *Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre*.
www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/qtmhc

7. Transplants and organ donation

Hinduism supports the donation and transplantation of organs. The decision to donate or receive organs is left to the individual.

8. Sexual and reproductive health

Contraception

There is no official Hindu position on contraception.

Abortion

Beliefs about abortion may vary depending on cultural or religious interpretations.

Many Hindus believe that the moment of conception marks the rebirth of an individual, which may make abortion unacceptable, except in emergencies⁴.

Assisted reproductive technologies

There is no official Hindu position on assisted reproductive technologies.

9. Pain management

Hinduism encourages the acceptance of pain and suffering as part of the consequences of *karma*. It is not seen as a punishment, but as a natural consequence of past negative behaviour and is often seen as an opportunity to progress spiritually¹⁶.

This may affect triaging or the monitoring of pain levels as Hindu patients may not be forthcoming about pain and may prefer to accept it as a means of progressing spiritually.

However, this behaviour may be less prevalent in Australia, especially among young people.

10. Death and dying

Hindus believe that the time of death is determined by one's destiny and accept death and illness as part of life.

As a result, treatment is not required to be provided to a Hindu patient if it merely prolongs the final stages of a terminal illness.

Under these circumstances, it is permitted to disconnect life supporting systems. However, suicide and euthanasia are forbidden in Hinduism.