

1. Communication issues

The 2006 census showed that more than 80 per cent of Queensland's Hindu population was born overseas, with the majority of people coming from a non-English speaking country. Health care providers should be aware that many Hindu patients may not be proficient in English.

The other languages most widely spoken by Hindus in Queensland include:

Bengali	Marathi
Fijian Hindi	Nepali
Gujarati	Oriya
Hindi	Punjabi
Kannada	Sindhi
Kashmiri	Tamil
Malayalam	Telugu

If a patient is assessed to have inadequate English, health care providers should engage a professional interpreter. Queensland Health provides a statewide interpreter service that can provide onsite, telephone and video remote interpreters in more than 100 languages.

Other Queensland Health resources which can assist with effective communication include:

- *Language Identification Card* – a card/poster which can assist health care providers to identify more than 60 languages
- *Guidelines on working with interpreters* – a comprehensive guide for health care providers on how to work with interpreters
- *Ward Communication Tool* – a booklet which features 30 words commonly used in health care, translated in 30 languages, with an accompanying graphic.

Further information about communicating with patients from a culturally and linguistically diverse background is contained in the Queensland Health *Multicultural Clinical Support Resource*.

www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/support_tools/mcsr.asp

2. Interpreter services

All Queensland Health patients have a right to an interpreter at no charge. Queensland Health policy is to always use a professional interpreter and to only use friends or family in an emergency. People under 18 years of age are not to be used as interpreters under any circumstances.

Queensland Health staff can request interpreters online through the Interpreter Services Information System (ISIS). Queensland Health staff should contact their Health Service District Interpreter Coordinator for more information.

www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/interpreters/QHIS_contact.asp

3. Patient rights

Queensland Health supports and implements the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights.

The charter specifies the key rights of patients and consumers when seeking or receiving healthcare services.

www.health.qld.gov.au/cpic/hlthcr_exp_improve/australiancharter.asp

Under the charter, all patients have seven health care rights:

- **Access** – a right to access healthcare services to address healthcare needs.
- **Safety** – a right to receive safe, high-quality health services provided with professional care, skill and competence.
- **Respect** – a right to be provided with care that shows respect to culture, beliefs, values and personal characteristics.
- **Communication** – the right to receive open, timely and appropriate communication about health care in a way that can be understood.
- **Participation** – the right to participate in making decisions and choices about care and about health service planning.
- **Privacy** – a right to the privacy and confidentiality of personal information.
- **Comment** – the right to comment on, or complain about care and have concerns dealt with promptly and properly.



There are three guiding principles which describe how the charter is applied in the Australian health system:

1. Everyone has the right to be able to access health care and this right is essential for the charter to be meaningful.
2. The Australian Government commits to international agreements about human rights which recognise everyone's right to have the highest possible standard of physical and mental health.
3. Australia is a society made up of people with different cultures and ways of life, and the charter acknowledges and respects these differences.

These rights apply to patients from all cultures and faiths in the health care setting.

4. Religious observance

Hinduism grants individuals complete freedom to practice his or her religion as they choose. As a result, it is important that health care providers discuss religious observance needs with each patient.

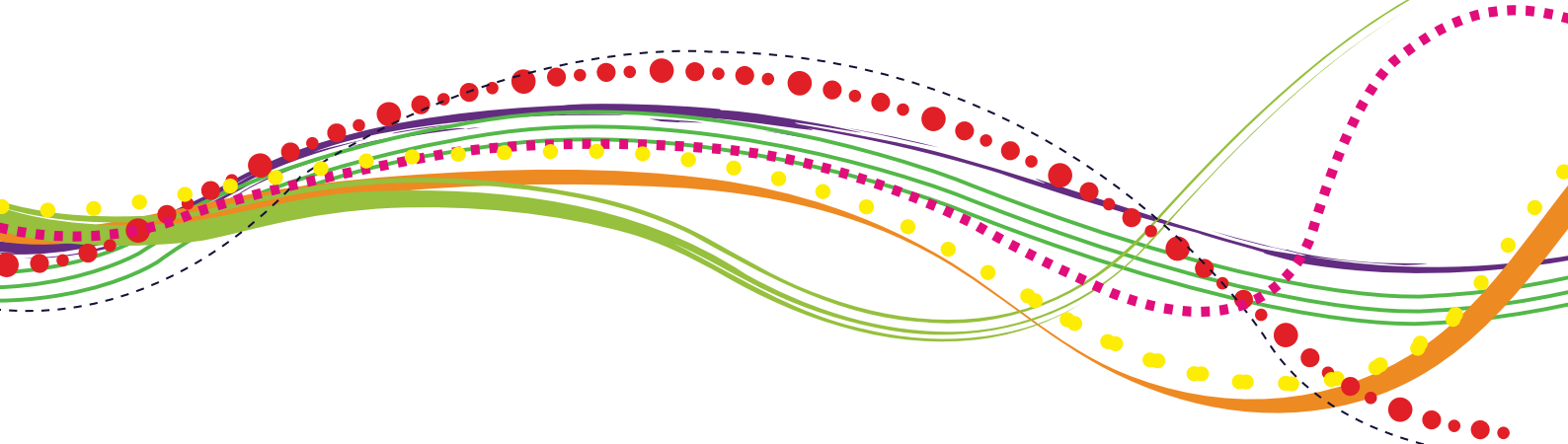
Some topics that health care providers may wish to discuss with their patients include prayer and meditation, bathing and cleanliness, dietary needs and astrological beliefs.

Prayer and meditation

- Prayer and meditation are important to many Hindus.
- There are no set times for prayers. However, most Hindus prefer to pray in the morning.
- Prayer can take place in any location, including in bed or in hospital prayer rooms.
- Hindu patients may wish to have religious statues or icons close by when in hospital.

Bathing and cleanliness

- The concept of purity is important to Hindu life and some Hindus may be quite meticulous about bathing and cleanliness.
- Most Hindus have a ritual of cleanliness and prayer each morning which includes brushing the teeth immediately upon waking, followed by bathing, prayer and then eating.
- A delay in eating to follow this ritual should not be interpreted as a refusal to eat.
- Washing of hands prior to eating is important as many Hindus eat with their hands.
- Washing with running water is important to Hindus and most will prefer a shower rather than a bath.
- Women may be considered impure or unclean when menstruating or following childbirth^{4,5}.



Dietary needs

- Many Hindus are strict vegetarians, abstaining from all meat, fish and eggs. Vegetarian Hindus do consume dairy products.
- Hindus who choose to follow a vegetarian diet do so because of a belief in non-violence which extends to animals, and a belief that non-vegetarian food impedes spiritual development⁶.
- Some Hindus choose to eat meat and do not follow a vegetarian diet.
- Most non-vegetarian Hindus do not eat beef or pork⁷ as cows are considered sacred and pigs are considered unclean⁴.
- Many non-vegetarian Hindus may choose to abstain from eating meat on particular days of the week. For example, a strict vegetarian diet may be observed on Mondays.
- Some strict vegetarian Hindus will not eat from plates or use utensils that have previously been used to serve meat.
- Most Hindus will eat only with the right hand. Some may not eat food which has been passed to them with the left hand.
- Fasting is common for Hindus and can vary from complete abstinence to only avoiding certain types of foods⁷.

- Fasting on a particular day of the week is also a common practice.

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

Astrological beliefs

- Many Hindus hold strong astrological beliefs and may believe the movement of the planets has a strong influence on health and wellbeing⁵.
- Patients may wish to schedule appointments or surgeries according to these beliefs.

5. Decision-making

Hinduism views the needs of the individual in the greater context of family, culture and environment⁸.

As a result, family members, especially elders, can have a strong influence on decision-making related to health matters, including informed consent.

Hindus may wish for family members to be responsible for making treatment decisions.



6. Administration of medicines

Traditional medicines and remedies

Hindus may use a variety of *Ayurvedic* medicines, home remedies and spiritual remedies, often in conjunction with Australian medicine. It is important for health care providers to be aware of their patient's preferences.

Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine practiced by many Hindus around the world. It is a highly valued and respected health science in India.

Ayurveda is practised by many Hindus in Australia and *Ayurvedic* medicines are regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). As a discipline, *Ayurveda* sits alongside Traditional Chinese Medicine in the TGA classification of complementary medicines⁹.

Based on *Ayurvedic* principles, Hindus believe that all illnesses, whether physical or mental, have a biological, psychological and spiritual element¹⁰. *Ayurveda* seeks to maintain a balance between the body's three elemental energies (humors). Good and bad health is related to the level of balance of these three energies.

Many Hindus also use traditional home remedies which are based on *Ayurvedic* medicine and are easily available from Indian grocery stores.

One of the most common Hindu spiritual remedies is *vibuthi*, or holy ash. *Vibuthi* is commonly used in Hindu religious worship and is believed to contain protective, purifying and healing properties when applied on the skin (particularly on the forehead), consumed in small quantities, or carried on the person in a small packet.

Medicines of animal origin

Some medicines may not be suitable for Hindu patients because they are derived from cows, pigs or other animals.

The *Queensland Health Guideline on Medicines/ Pharmaceutical Products of Animal Origin* states that health care providers should inform patients about the origins of their proposed medication if it is derived from animals and no suitable synthetic alternative exists. Patients should be encouraged to make informed decisions regarding their treatment.

The manufacturer's *product information* gives details about the composition of the medicine (i.e. listing the active and inactive constituents/ingredients) and provides a description of how the medicine was produced (e.g. whether manufacture of the product included exposure to animal derived materials).

http://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/medicines/documents/general_policies/prods_anim_origin.pdf

7. Clinical examination and procedures

Modesty is an important consideration for Hindu men and women, and patients may prefer to be examined by a health care provider of their own gender. Hindu patients may also wish to have a family member present during a clinical examination or procedure.

The need for invasive examinations may need to be carefully explained, particularly if a same-sex clinician cannot be accommodated.

Hindu women may wear a sacred thread, ring or gold chain around their necks and Hindu men and boys may wear a sacred thread across the chest. All Hare Krishna followers, and some other Hindus, may wear sacred *tulsi* beads around the neck. The permission of the patient or their family should be sought before these items are removed during a clinical examination or procedure.

8. Hygiene

Hinduism places great emphasis on purity, in both physical and spiritual terms.

A Hindu may wish for a beaker of water to be made available whenever they use a bed pan and toilets should be equipped with a small water container to assist with washing. (This practice may be less frequently followed in Australia). Older Hindus may have a preference for showering after defecation.

Patients who are washed in bed or who require assistance with washing, may have a strong preference for washing to start with the face and proceed towards the feet.



Oral hygiene

- Oral hygiene is very important to most Hindus, especially those who practice *Ayurvedic* principles.
- Many Hindus prefer to brush their teeth immediately after waking in the morning and some may also scrape their tongue with a metal tongue scraper. This is done to avoid the ingestion of impurities that may have built up in the mouth during sleep.
- Hindu patients may also wish to brush their teeth immediately after waking from general anaesthesia or surgery for the same reason.
- Health care providers should explain the benefits of also brushing the teeth after eating.
- Many Hindus use home remedies for oral hygiene and health purposes, including chewing mint leaves, cloves or fennel seeds.
- Oral health examinations and treatments are usually not regarded as invasive by Hindu patients.

9. Maternity services

- A small number of Hindu ceremonies accompany pregnancy and childbirth.
- While most of these ceremonies are completed in private, there are some which may be completed while the mother and infant are in hospital care.
- After childbirth, a Hindu father may wish to perform the *Jatakarma* ceremony to welcome the infant into the world. As part of the ceremony, the father touches and smells the infant and whispers mantras (religious verses) into the infant's ears¹⁰.
- Another rite which is performed shortly after birth involves drawing a small dot (often in the shape of an *Om* ॐ) behind the infant's ear. The *Om* symbol may also be placed on a chain around the infant's neck or placed in the cot¹¹.

- A family member may also wish to write the *Om* symbol on the infant's tongue with *jaggery* (unrefined whole cane sugar) dipped in ghee or honey¹¹.
- Health care providers should advise parents that feeding honey to infants below the age of 12 months is not recommended in Australia due to the risk of infant botulism.
- The sixth day after birth is considered the most auspicious in a person's life. On this day, a fragile white cotton thread is ceremoniously tied around the infant's wrist, ankle or neck. A pen and blank piece of paper may also be placed in the infant's cot as it is believed that on this day *Saraswati* (The Goddess of Learning) charts the child's future¹¹.
- Some Hindus may wish to bury the umbilical cord on the sixth day after birth. If there are clinical reasons for not providing the umbilical cord to the parents, this should be explained.
- The naming ceremony (*Namakarana*) usually occurs at the infant's home after birth.
- Depending on family customs, the ceremony may be delayed if the infant requires extended hospital care.
- Some Hindu women may wish to express colostrum before feeding their baby for the first time.
- Health professionals should inform women of the benefits of feeding their infant colostrum.
- More information about pregnancy and birth practices of people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background is contained in the Queensland Health *Multicultural Clinical Support Resource*.
www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/support_tools/mcsr.asp

10. Community health services

Home visits

- Hindus may prefer for shoes to be removed when entering a home.
- If this is not possible for Workplace Health and Safety reasons, alternatives should be explored (e.g. wearing plastic shoe covers).
- Health care providers should avoid taking meat products into the homes of vegetarian Hindus.

Rehabilitation issues

- Self care practices involving eating or drinking are ideally performed with the right hand.
- Health care providers should be aware that where a patient has lost the ability to use their right hand,



sensitivity may be required.

- Similarly, loss of function in the left hand may affect the patient's comfort with bathing and washing habits.

11. Visiting arrangements

- Visiting the sick is an important responsibility for Hindus.
- Hindu patients may have large numbers of visitors, including those from outside their immediate family.
- Health care providers should discuss with the patient, or their family, the impact a large number of visitors may have on rest or care requirements, and other patients.
- Patients may wish for family members to stay in the hospital overnight. This should be accommodated, if possible.



12. Care of family and older persons

- Hinduism encourages family members to take a role in the care of family members.
- Hinduism especially emphasises respect for all older people, with children having a special responsibility towards their parents¹².
- It is considered a family obligation to care for the elderly and the sick¹².
- Health care providers should take this into account when developing care plans or suggesting nursing or residential care.

13. End of life issues

- The sanctity of life is central to Hindu teachings⁸.
- Hindus believe that all living beings possess a soul which passes through successive cycles of birth and rebirth⁸.
- Hindu patients may wish to die at home, as this has particular religious significance³.
- The patient's eldest son is expected to be present before during and after death, even if the son is a small child⁴.
- Other family members may wish to be present and to participate in the care of the patient.
- Family members may request that patients not be told about a terminal diagnosis directly⁵.
- A Hindu patient may wish for a *Pandit* (priest) to be present to perform certain rituals including:
 - tying a sacred thread around the neck or wrist
 - placing a few drops of water from the River Ganges into the patient's mouth
 - placing a sacred *tulsi* leaf (holy basil) in the patient's mouth⁴.
- A Hindu patient, especially a Hare Krishna follower, may wear sacred *tulsi* beads (a string of small wooden prayer beads) around their neck. It is important that these be on the body at the time of death.
- If it is necessary to remove these beads, they should be retied around the wrist (preferably right).
- Patients may wish to read or recite religious chants and prayers. However, some patients may prefer to listen on a personal media player or small radio.

- Hindu chaplaincy services are available in many Queensland Health facilities.

Refer to section three for a list of Hindu organisations.

14. Deceased patients

- A deceased Hindu's body is usually washed by close family members with the eldest son taking a leading role⁴.
- The family may wish to light a small lamp or burn incense near the body.
- If possible, all jewellery, sacred threads and religious objects should be left in place.
- Health care providers should advise family members if it is necessary to remove these items.
- The deceased patient's family may have a preference for the position of the body after death.
- Hindus are usually cremated as soon as possible after death⁵.

15. Autopsy

- Hindus generally regard autopsies as unacceptable. However, autopsy is permitted if required under Queensland statutory laws⁵.
- Hindus are usually cremated as soon as possible after death, and autopsy may affect this practice.
- Health care providers should consult with the family of a deceased Hindu patient before proceeding with an autopsy.