

1. Food beliefs

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

Many Sikhs follow a strict vegetarian diet, abstaining from consuming any fish, meat or eggs. However, vegetarian Sikhs do consume dairy products.

Sikhs who are not vegetarian may choose to abstain from eating pork or beef. However, all Sikhs are prohibited from eating any meat that has been ritually slaughtered including *halal* or *kosher* meats⁴.

Sikhs are also prohibited from consuming alcohol, tobacco or other intoxicants⁵ and do not fast for any religious reasons⁴.

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

2. Holy days

Sikhs do not observe a specific day of worship, although communities may choose to congregate at the *Gurdwara* (temple) on a specific day.

Sikhs do observe a number of holy days and festivals throughout the year.

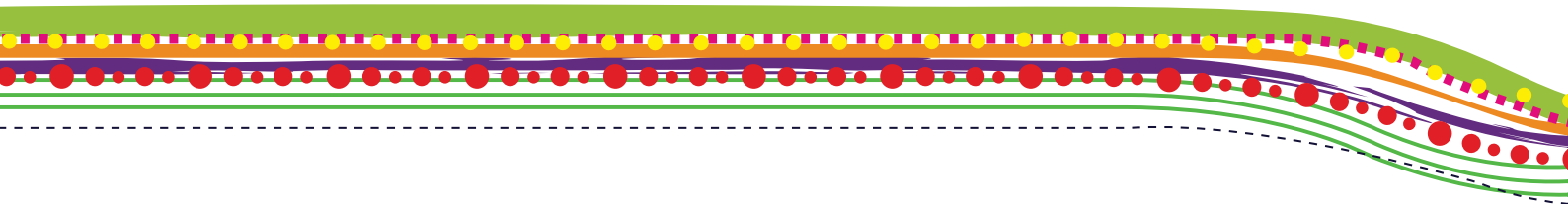
A religious calendar is published in the Queensland Health *Multicultural Clinical Support Resource*.
www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/support_tools/mcsr.asp

3. Dress

One of the five articles of faith for Sikhs is the *Kachera* (an undergarment similar to drawstring shorts), which must be worn by both men and women at all times.

If the *Kachera* is required to be removed for examination or treatment purposes, permission should be sought from the patient or accommodation should be made to allow them to be kept on one leg.





Sikhs are also required to wear a turban at all times. The turban is a symbol of a Sikh's honour and is worn as a covering for one of the articles of faith – *Kesh* (uncut hair). A smaller turban called a *patka* can be worn when in hospital.

If it is necessary to remove the turban during medical treatment, an alternative head covering should be provided. A surgical cap can be worn over the turban or *patka* if necessary.

A turban should be treated with respect and never placed on the floor or with shoes.

Women may choose to cover their hair with a turban or a scarf. These items should be treated with the same respect.

4. Mental health and/or cognitive dysfunction

- Sikhs are encouraged to use prayer and meditation to alleviate depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses.
- Sikhs with mental illness are encouraged to participate in spiritual activities and gatherings at the *Gurdwara* (temple).
- Sikhism does not support the belief that cognitive dysfunction and mental illness are caused by spirit possession or as a punishment for breaching religious principles. Sikhs are encouraged to seek medical treatment.
- Although Sikhs should not attach a stigma to cognitive dysfunction or mental illness, some Sikhs may believe that mental illness is caused by external factors such as the *evil eye* (*jado-tuna*) or possession by demons or evil spirits.
- Family members may attempt to hide mental illness from the community or other relatives due to possible stigma.
- 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

5. Transplants, organ donation and blood transfusions

Sikhism supports the donation and transplantation of organs⁶ and allows for blood transfusions.

Sikhs are encouraged to help others in need and donating organs is considered a noble gesture.

6. Sexual and reproductive health

Contraception

Sikhs are permitted to use contraception¹⁰.

Abortion

Sikhs believe the foetus to be alive immediately upon conception and abortion is not permitted unless there is a serious threat to the mother's life¹⁰.

Abortion is not permitted on the basis of family planning.

Assisted reproductive technologies

Sikhs are permitted to use assisted reproductive technologies only during the span of a marriage⁵.

It is preferred for the husband to provide the sperm⁵. However, if this is not possible, a donor can be used depending on the couple's preference.

7. Death and dying

Sikhs are encouraged to accept death and illness as part of life and the will of God.

Due to the Sikh belief in the doctrine of *karma*, some Sikh patients may be accepting of death⁶.

Family members should be consulted where the situation requires treatment to be provided to prolong the final stages of a terminal illness. If it is acceptable to the patient's family, life supporting systems may be disconnected. However, suicide and euthanasia are forbidden in Sikhism¹¹.

Grieving and bereavement

Some Sikhs believe that excessive grief can interfere with the peaceful departure of the soul⁵.