

Brazil

COMMUNICATION

Languages and Dialects

- Official spoken languages: Portuguese
- Other languages: Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, English, and native languages among groups in the Amazon
- Brazilians do not consider themselves Hispanic and may take offense if addressed in Spanish.

Greetings

Greetings play an important role among Brazilians in establishing relationships.

- Shaking hands while maintaining steady eye contact is a common form of greeting among men. Men may also offer a hearty slap on the back as they greet one another.
- Women may kiss both cheeks as they greet another woman, kissing the right cheek first, then the left. This greeting may be used when meeting and then as they depart.
- If a woman wishes to shake hands with a man, she should extend her hand.
- Close friends will often embrace as part of a greeting.
- If a client is accompanied by family or friends, greet each person in the group as they arrive and then again as they leave.

Names and Titles

- Brazilian names typically consist of a first name, the mother's family name, and then the father's family name.
- When a woman marries, she may drop her mother's and father's family names.
- Some Brazilian people who face literacy issues may be accustomed to using their thumbprint as a signature.

Conversation

- Brazilians may keep feelings to themselves for fear of hurting someone.
- Personal lives are private topics for many Brazilian people.
- Brazilians speak very quickly. Expect fast-paced conversations with interruptions that indicate enthusiasm for the conversation.
- Brazilians may try to avoid confrontations, and they may attempt to conceal frustration.

Non-Verbal Signals

- Brazilians may stand close to one another while in conversation.
- Employ steady eye contact with a Brazilian person; breaking eye contact during conversation may be considered insulting.
- As you talk with a Brazilian, expect frequent touching (arms, hands, shoulders), hand gestures, and facial expressions.
- To add emphasis, a Brazilian person may snap their fingers or wave their hands up and down.
- If a Brazilian doesn't know the answer to a question (or doesn't understand), then they may gesture by scraping fingertips under their chin.
- To beckon someone from Brazil, wave your fingers toward your body with palm facing down.
- Avoid yawning or stretching in public; both are considered rude.
- The 'okay' sign (joining first finger and thumb to form a circle) is considered vulgar.



CULTURAL NORMS

Patient and Provider Interaction

Brazilian immigrants may be offended if healthcare providers do not appear to make an effort to understand personal circumstances or points-of-view.

Be sure to spend time asking the patient why they think they have become ill, how the illness is affecting daily life, and what type of treatment they think may be needed.

- Brazilian people may expect a formal clothing style and careful grooming from their medical professionals; therefore, err on the side of overdressing.
- When providing patient education, take time to explain the rationale behind what you do.
- Brazilian people do not adhere to standard concepts of time and punctuality. It may be helpful to discuss schedules and meeting times during appointments.
- For many Brazilian people, the phrase '*Daqui um pouco*' ('a little while from now') may mean five minutes from now, or a half-hour from now, or even a day from now.
- In Brazil, it is common for people to take unexpected holidays.

Behavior in Clinic

- A client from Brazil who has been vaccinated with BCG may feel discriminated against if a provider insists that the client take a tuberculin skin test.
- Brazilians tend to talk about serious illnesses; however, they may avoid discussion of minor illnesses.
- Many Brazilians feel that talking about an illness may make the condition worse.
- Brazilians don't like to talk about pain or discomfort.
- Literacy levels are low in some parts of Brazil. Printed educational materials – even in the official spoken language – may not be an effective approach to educating some patients, including ensuring treatment adherence.

Family and Cultural Issues

Brazilians are especially sensitive to embarrassment – they are sensitive to perceived criticism, especially in public.

Criticizing a Brazilian person causes them to 'lose face' with others.

The person doing the criticizing also 'loses face', as they have ignored an important social rule.

- Medical decision-making and care may involve extended family members. Before making a treatment plan, ask the patient who should be present at the meeting.
- While men are traditionally head of household, women play a major role in decisions involving health and disease. Very often, the mother, grandmother, or oldest daughter will carry out medical instructions.

Visiting the Home

- If you arrive on time, then you may be considered impolite.
- Don't refuse an offer of black coffee – doing so may be considered inhospitable, since coffee is a symbol of hospitality.
- If you are invited for a meal, be prepared to stay for the entire meal, including dessert and coffee – and be prepared to accept second helpings.
- Some Brazilians use toothpicks or napkins to pick up food that others may consider 'finger food'.
- If you do not finish everything on your plate, then your host may believe you did not enjoy your food.

Medication

- Brazilians often purchase over-the-counter medications as part of home treatment, including antibiotics (without prescription).
- People may seek healthcare advice from pharmacists, who may prescribe medications and treat illnesses – particularly for those in lower socioeconomic groups.
- In the US, Brazilians may rely on prescriptions brought from Brazil. They may want to delay treatment until the diagnosed person can return to Brazil.

TRADITIONAL IDEAS AND BELIEFS

Beliefs about TB

- Brazilian people may believe TB could be caused by poverty or by poor sanitation.
- According to a 2006 report by the Stop TB Partnership, a survey found that 90 percent of Brazilians knew that TB is curable, yet only about half of surveyed Brazilians knew that treatment for TB lasts six months.

Stigma and TB

Although stigma and stigmatizing practices continue to exist, do not assume all Brazilian patients and their families will believe the misperceptions listed here.

- Brazilians may consider TB to be a rare disease, or a disease of the past; therefore, a TB diagnosis may come as a surprise.
- Even if a person diagnosed with TB is receiving treatment, and is therefore not infectious, they may still feel shame because of the diagnosis.
- Although a family may support their diagnosed family member, the family's social status may generate pressure to keep the illness secret.
- Wealthier families are more likely to be secretive about a TB diagnosis.
- Diagnosed people may be shunned by others due to fear of infection.

Common Terms for TB

A Brazilian person may refer to TB by the word *tuberculose*.

Traditional Beliefs

These points could be used to provide context for a range of health issues, including inherited conditions, sudden onset illnesses, and other diagnoses.

- Individuals within Afro-Brazilian cultures may believe that if a person acts rebellious or envious, then they may become sick.
- They may also believe that if a person has fear of catching a disease, or if they have a predisposition to a certain disease, then they may become sick.
- Individuals within Afro-Brazilian cultures may believe disease transmission is connected with everyday behavior, including social interactions.
- Some indigenous Brazilian people may believe that the only cure for 'Western illnesses' are Western pharmaceuticals. To that end, these groups may consume as many 'Western medicines' as possible.
- Some indigenous Brazilian people are receptive to Western medications, but they may view them as 'largely undifferentiated' because of similar packaging.
- Brazilians may self-medicate or seek a community-based approach to the diagnosis and treatment of illness.

Traditional Remedies

Homeopathy is very common in Brazil; homeopathic pharmacists often prescribe medications to treat a range of illnesses.

Homeopathic treatments may be preferred by Brazilians under the following conditions:

- When a patient believes health is related to concepts of balance (or imbalance) within the body;
- When a patient believes interactions between the body and the mind impact health;
- When patients feel a level of dissatisfaction with conventional medical treatments;
- When patients are influenced by family, friends, or the cost of treatment.

Examples of homeopathic treatment include the following:

- Acupuncture
- Tonics, teas and salves made with plants (including roots and leaves)

Traditional Healers

Brazilians may combine Western medical treatment with traditional treatment. Those who seek care from traditional healers first (or exclusively) may do so for economic reasons.

Traditional healers include *Santeros* and *Espiritistas*, people believed to have spiritual powers that control (or eliminate) spirits (and therefore disease).

Other traditional healers include the following:

- *Rezadeiras*, praying women who exorcise illnesses;
- *Catimbozeiros*, sorcerers who perform possession rituals;
- *Curandeiros*, faith healers (also referred to as 'witch doctors');
- *Mai* or *pai de santo*, head priestesses or priests.

Many of these traditional healers form close personal relationships with their patients, acknowledging patients' religious and cultural beliefs.