

Puerto Ricans in New York are healthier ^[1]

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By Uriyoán Colón Ramos / Special for El Nuevo Día endi.com ^[2] Lack of exercise and the adoption of the American diet, notoriously high in fat and sugar, are two of the main reasons that help explain the difference in the obesity and related diseases rates between immigrants in the United States and their fellow country people that still live in their countries of origin. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that obesity tends to increase according to the number of years that the immigrant has lived in the United States. For that reason you would expect obesity to be a more serious health problem among Puerto Ricans living in the US, than in those living in the Island. However, a new study published in the Pan-American Journal of Public Health goes against this hypothesis. The study, done by researchers in the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the Department of Health of the state of New York, Tufts University and the University of Puerto Rico, compared the prevalence of obesity among Puerto Ricans in the Island and those living in the US (New York) and found the same number of people with obesity in both places. According to the authors, the lack of physical activity and the low consumption of fruits and vegetables by the majority of the people in the Island could be the reason for this phenomenon. More than half of the Puerto Rican population (55%) reported zero physical activity in a month, as compared to 24% of the white non-Hispanic population in the US. In terms of diet, only 7% of the people in Puerto Rico follows the recommendation of consuming at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables a day, and the food choice lacks a diversity of fruits and cereals. These results reveal a lot about the future of obesity and related diseases in the Island. Although people in the Island have less obstacles in obtaining health care as compared to Puerto Ricans in the US, due to less

language barriers or more access to medical insurance among low income populations, the primary care in preventive health and diabetes among those in the Island is worst than among those in the US. The study also revealed that in Puerto Rico diabetes is diagnosed at a later age compared to the US. This lack of preventive care could be due to the less frequent administration of diagnostic tests among those insured by the 1993's Health Reform (government's health care), in comparison to those with a private insurance. The authors also suggest that this difference could be based in a lack of education about preventive health care in the Island. The results of this study are alarming; the obesity problem among Puerto Ricans in the Island, due to the lack of exercise and poor nutrition emphasizes the need to focus initiatives in the Island towards the preventive health from an early age.

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