# Arab Culture - At a Glance

Common cultural norms, values, and traits of the Arabic population.

## Quick Facts
- The term Arab is associated with a particular region of the world.
- Any person who adopts the Arabic language is typically considered Arab.
- There are 22 Arab countries/areas: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
- Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries. Not all Arabs are Muslims, nor are all Muslims are Arab.

## Gender
- The society is Patriarchal and hierarchal: Fathers/elders dominate.
- Not all women are oppressed by men, this is a negative stereotype.
- Men stand when women enter a room.
- Women wear headscarves as a show of respect, even if wearing Western clothing.
- It’s customary to not stand close to, stare at, or touch a woman.
- It’s customary to not ask men questions about his wife or other female members of his family.

## Religion
- The Arab world includes Muslims, Christians and Jews.
- Arabic is the official and the original language of the Qur’an, the Islamic holy book.
- Arabs are religiously diverse group – significant numbers of Arab Christians.
- Religion often play a role in politics.
- Followers of Islam are called Muslims.

## Communication Styles
- Admitting, “I don’t know” is distasteful to Arabs.
- Constructive criticism can be taken as an insult. Be careful not to insult.
- Body Language takes on extra significance in Arab culture.
- When speaking with Arabs keep in mind that they believe that words have power.

## Traditional Beliefs on Health & Medicine
- Personal hygiene is extremely important to Arabs for both spiritual and practical reasons.
- Meals are frequently eaten by hand. It is typical to wash the hands before and after eating.
- Formal washing of face, hands, and forearm required before daily prayers or fasting.
- It is considered bad manners to eat, drink, or smoke in front of someone fasting.

## Personal Space & Social Gestures
- Most Arabs do not share the American concept of “personal space” in public situations, and in private meetings or conversations.
- It is considered offensive to step or lean away. Women are an exception to this rule.
- When conducting business, it is customary to first shake the hand of all males present, taking care not to grip too firmly.
- It is important to first establish respect and trust.

## Familial Structure
- The family is the key social unit to an Arab. They honor and respect their family.
- Friendships are highly valued.
- Clan and then tribe in terms of loyalty follow family as a social unit, although most contemporary Arabs express a national identity as well.

## About ECHO
The mission of ECHO is to leverage partnerships to deliver vital health, safety, emergency and civic engagement information to help the ever-changing, diverse population integrate and become successful in our communities.

The above information was provided by the following organizations and individuals: the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, and Stratis Health www.stratishealth.org. This information sheet is not intended to be an exhaustive approach or complete representation of the Somali culture, but rather a basic introduction and foundation.

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