

# DEPRESSION – WHY IT MATTERS



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# WHAT WILL WE COVER TODAY

- Why it matters
- What is depression
- Possible causes causes depression in older adults
- Risk factors
- What it looks like for seniors – signs and symptoms
- Is it something else
- Is there treatment
- What you can do for yourself
- What you can do for older adults you are concerned about
- Resources



# DEPRESSION – WHAT IS IT?

- Depression is a serious mood disorder that affects the way one feels, acts, and thinks.
- Depression is a common problem among older adults.
- Clinical depression is **not** a normal part of aging.
- Depression is serious, and treatments are available to help and for most, depression gets better with treatment.



# DEPRESSION – WHAT IS IT?

## Types of depression that older adults may experience:

- *Major Depressive Disorder* – symptoms lasting at least two weeks that interfere with a person's ability to perform daily tasks
- *Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia)* – depressed mood that lasts more than two years, but the person may still be able to perform daily tasks
- *Substance/Medication-Induced Depressive Disorder* – depression related to the use of substances, like alcohol or pain medication
- *Depressive Disorder Due to A Medical Condition* – depression related to a separate illness, like heart disease or multiple sclerosis.

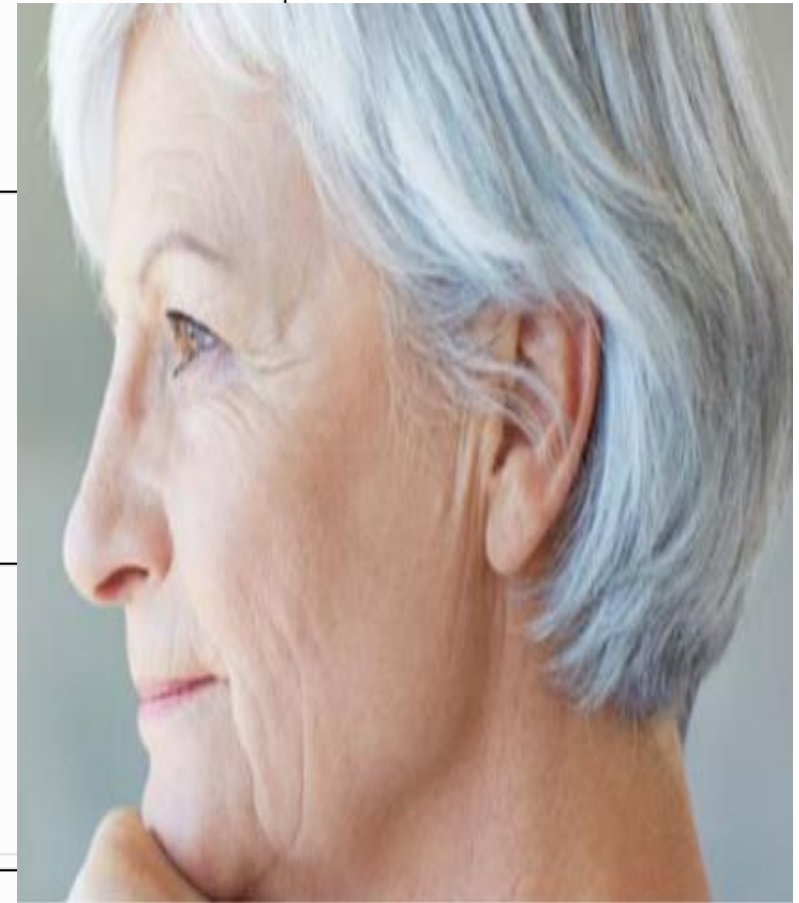
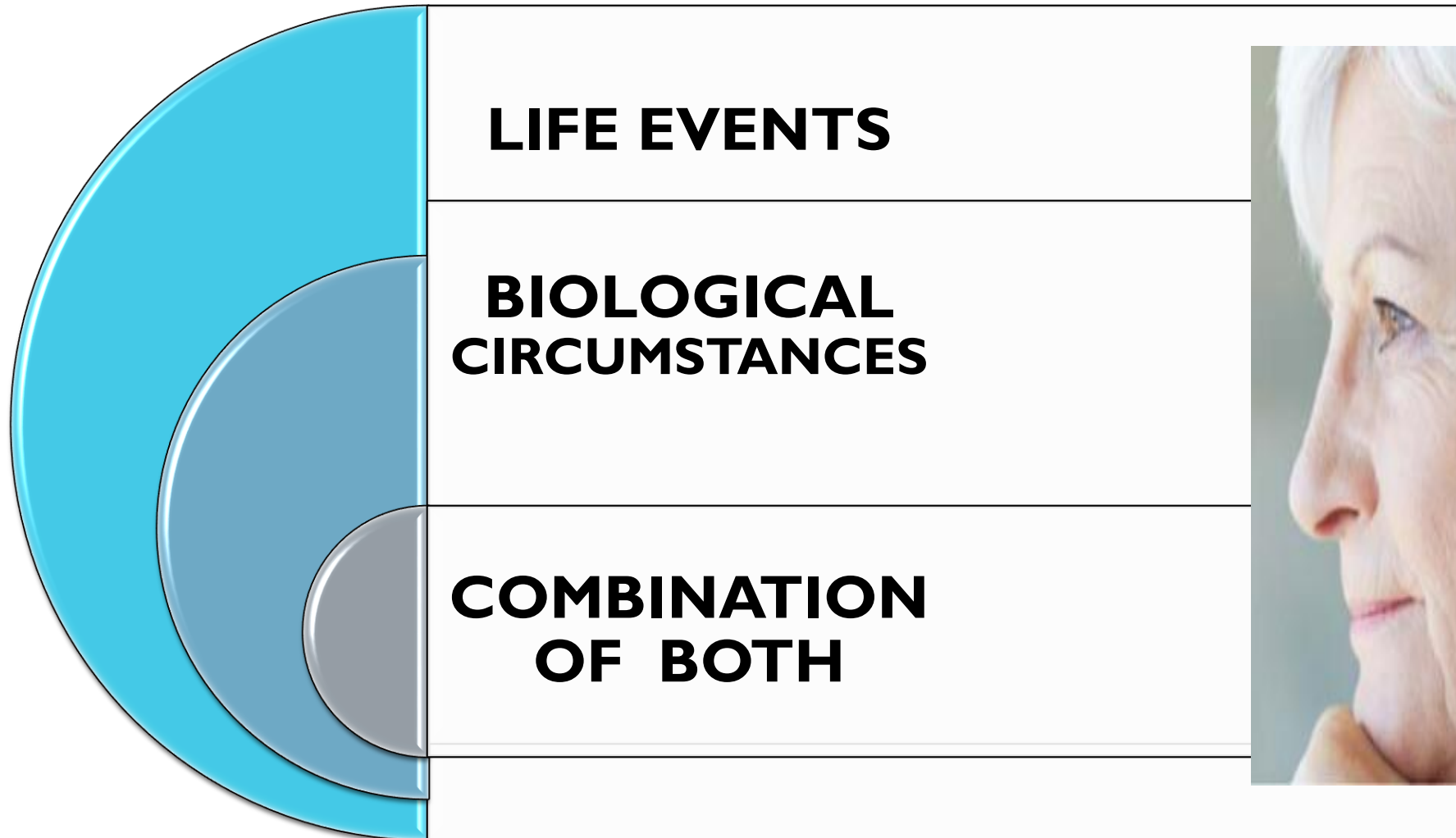


# NOT A NORMAL PART OF AGING STILL AN ISSUE THAT NEEDS ATTENTION

- Rate of major depression in older adults is relatively low, touching 3-5% of older adults aged 65 and over living in the community.
- On the other hand, the prevalence of symptoms of depression in this population is significantly higher, with about 15% of older persons in the community reporting significant levels of depressive symptoms
- Some subgroups of older adults present a higher risk for depression, in particular individuals afflicted by chronic disease, older adults living in long-term care and nursing homes, and those providing care for a family member (e.g., to a partner suffering from dementia).
- Depression can affect anyone at any age, but is often not recognized in older adults. This is because some signs of depression can be mistaken for signs of aging, and also because older adults who are depressed may not complain about feeling low.
- When left untreated, depression may continue for weeks, months or even years. Untreated depression is the main cause of suicide in older adults.

# COMMON CAUSES

The Three Main Causes Of Depression In Older People



# CAUSES OF DEPRESSION IN OLDER ADULTS

- **Health problems.** Illness and disability, chronic or severe pain, cognitive decline, damage to your body image due to surgery or sickness can all be contributors to depression.
- **Loneliness and isolation.** Factors such as living alone, a dwindling social circle due to deaths or relocation, decreased mobility due to illness or a loss of driving privileges can trigger depression.
- **Reduced sense of purpose.** Retirement can bring with it a loss of identity, status, self-confidence, and financial security and increase the risk of depression. Physical limitations on activities you used to enjoy can also impact your sense of purpose.
- **Fears.** These include a fear of death or dying as well as anxiety over finances, health issues, or abuse/neglect.
- **Recent bereavements.** The death of friends, family members, and pets, or loss of a spouse or partner are common causes of depression in older adults.

# MEDICAL CONDITIONS THAT CAN CAUSE ELDERLY DEPRESSION

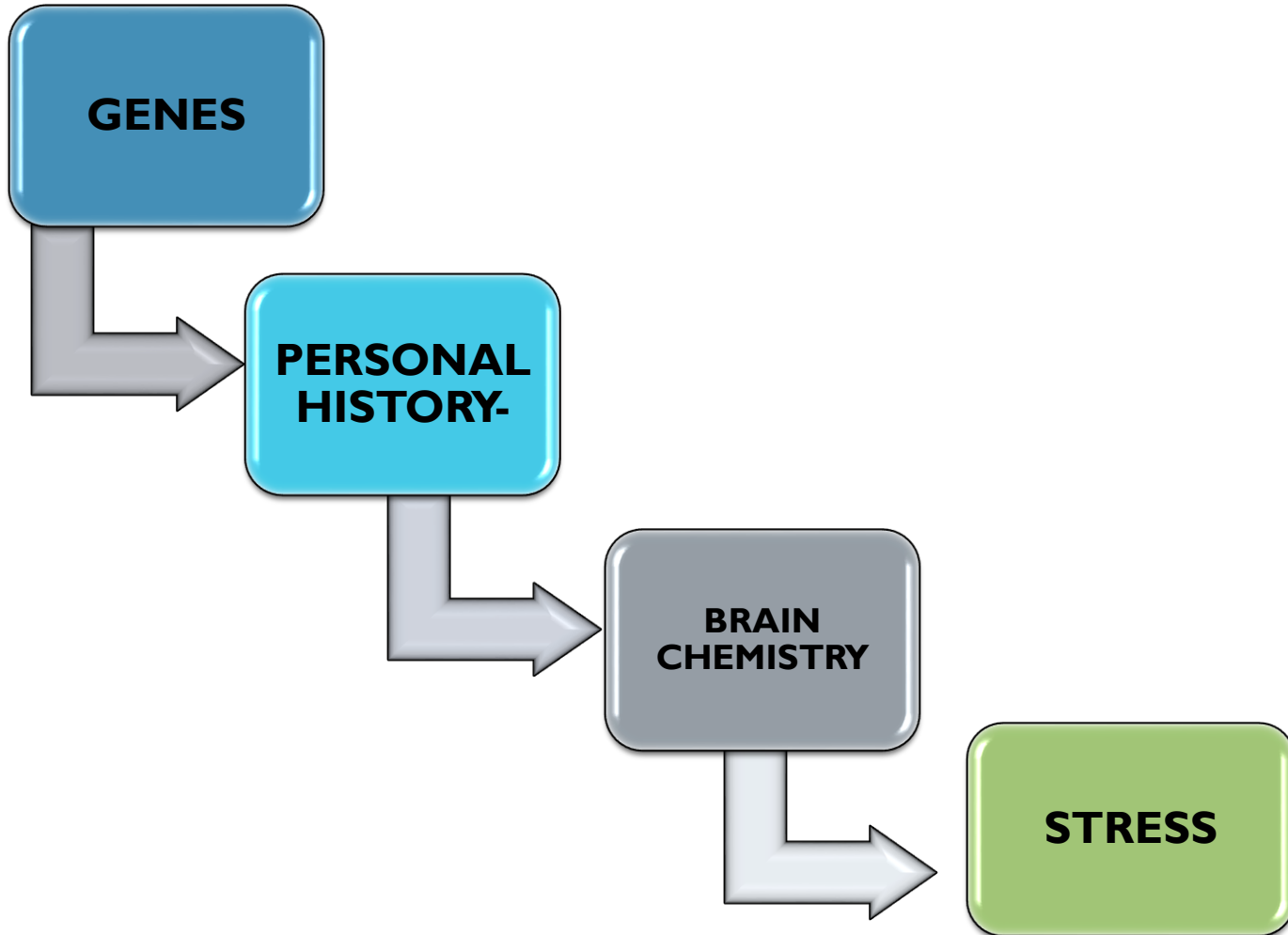
- Parkinson's disease
- Stroke
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disorders
- Vitamin B12 deficiency
- Dementia/Alzheimer's disease
- Lupus
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)



# MEDICATIONS THAT CAN CAUSE OR WORSEN DEPRESSION

- Blood pressure medication (e.g. clonidine).
- Beta-blockers (e.g. Lopressor, Inderal).
- High-cholesterol drugs (e.g. Lipitor, Mevacor, Zocor).
- Tranquilizers (e.g. Valium, Xanax, Halcion).
- Calcium-channel blockers.
- Medication for Parkinson's disease.
- Sleeping pills
- Ulcer medication (e.g. Zantac, Tagamet).
- Heart drugs containing reserpine.
- Steroids (e.g. cortisone and prednisone).
- Painkillers and arthritis drugs.
- Estrogens (e.g. Premarin, Prempro).
- Anticholinergic drugs used to treat GI disorder

# STRESS AND OTHER RISK FACTORS



# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION IN OLDER ADULTS

- Sadness or feelings of despair.
- Unexplained or aggravated aches and pains.
- Loss of interest in socializing or hobbies.
- Weight loss or loss of appetite.
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
- Lack of motivation and energy.
- Sleep disturbances (difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, oversleeping, or daytime sleepiness).
- Loss of self-worth (worries about being a burden, feelings of worthlessness or self-loathing).
- Slowed movement or speech.
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Fixation on death; thoughts of suicide.
- Memory problems.
- Neglecting personal care (skipping meals, forgetting meds, neglecting personal hygiene).

# COULD IT BE SOMETHING ELSE?

## Is it Depression or Dementia?

### Symptoms of Depression

Mental decline is relatively rapid

Know the correct time, date, and where you are

Difficulty concentrating

Language and motor skills are slow, but normal

You notice or worry about memory problems

### Symptoms of Dementia

Mental decline happens slowly

Be confused and disoriented; become lost in familiar locations

Difficulty with short-term memory

Writing, speaking, and motor skills are impaired

You don't notice memory problems or seem to care

# TREATMENT

**No single cause = no one treatment which works for everyone.**

Finding the right depression treatment often takes time.

Typical treatment involves a combination of therapy, medication, and lifestyle changes.

**LIFE STYLE CHANGES**

**PROFESSIONAL HELP**



# #1 REACH OUT AND STAY CONNECTED

- **Get out in to the world.** Try not to stay cooped up at home all day. Go to the park, take a trip to the hairdresser, have lunch with a friend, visit a museum, or go to a concert or a play.
- **Volunteer your time.** Helping others is one of the best ways to feel better about yourself and expand your social network.
- **Join a depression support group.** Being with others facing the same problems can help reduce your sense of isolation. It can also be inspiring to hear how others cope with depression.
- **Take care of a pet.** A pet can keep you company, and walking a dog, for example, can be good exercise for you and a great way to meet people. Dog owners love to chat while their pets play together.
- **Take a class or join a club** to meet like-minded people. Try joining a senior centre, a book club, or another group of people with similar interests.
- **Create opportunities to laugh.** Laughter provides a mood boost, so swap humorous stories and jokes with your loved ones, watch a comedy, or read a funny book. Laughter yoga?

## #2 FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE

- **Focus on what you can still do, not what you used to be able to do.** Maybe you feel frustrated that you're not able to do everything you once could, or at least not to the same levels? Or perhaps negative ideas about growing older have dented your self-confidence? Instead of focusing on what you once did, try focusing on the things you *can* do. You'll see just how much you still have to offer.
- **Learn a new skill.** Pick something that you've always wanted to learn, or that sparks your imagination and creativity—a musical instrument, a foreign language, or a new game or sport, for example. Learning new activities not only adds meaning and joy to life, but can also help to maintain your brain health and prevent mental decline.
- **Get involved in your community.** Try attending a local event, tutoring kids, or volunteering for a cause that's important to you. Community work can be a great way of utilizing and passing on the skills you honed in your career—without the commitment or stress of regular employment.
- **Take pride in your appearance.** When you retire, it's easy to let yourself go a little now you don't have to be at work every day. But putting effort into how you look each morning can give your self-confidence a welcome boost and improve how you feel.
- **Travel.** Once you're retired and your kids have left home, you likely have more time on your hands to visit the places you've always wanted to go. Book a vacation to somewhere new or take a weekend trip to a favorite place. Travel doesn't have to be extravagant or expensive to boost your mood. Enjoy time in nature by taking a scenic walk or hike, going fishing or camping, or spending a day at the beach.
- **Write your memoirs,** learn to paint, or take up a new craft.
- **Spirituality:** Examining your faith can involve returning to your roots, may include meditation, prayer and other practices

## #3 ADOPT HEALTHY HABITS

- **Move your body** - Exercise is a powerful depression treatment. In fact, research suggests it can be just as effective as antidepressants. Does not need to be rigorous to see benefit, a short walk and see how you feel. Anything that gets you up and moving helps.
- **Eat to support your mood** Adjusting your diet is hard for any of us but the research supports: lower sugars and refined carbs, (which can give you a boost but can lead to a crash) Instead, focus on quality protein, complex carbs, and healthy fats which will leave you satisfied and emotionally balanced. Going too long without eating can also worsen your mood, making you tired and irritable, so do your best to eat something at least every 3-4 hours.
- **Support quality sleep** Many older adults have sleeping issues, particularly insomnia. But lack of sleep makes depression worse. Aim for somewhere between 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. You can help yourself get better quality sleep by avoiding alcohol and caffeine, keeping a regular sleep-wake schedule, and making sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool.
- **Spend time in sunlight** Sunlight can help boost serotonin levels, improve your mood, and cope with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), at least 15 minutes a day.
- **Alcohol and depression** in older adults It can be tempting to use alcohol to pain both physical and emotional. It may help take your mind off an illness, feel less lonely, or get to sleep. But alcohol makes symptoms of depression and anxiety worse over the long run. It also impairs brain function and interacts in negative ways with numerous medications, including antidepressants.



## #4 KNOW WHEN TO SEE A PROFESSIONAL

- **Medications** - antidepressants, if used must be monitored closely as there are often other risk factors to consider
- **Counseling and therapy**
  - **Supportive counseling** includes religious and peer counseling. It can ease loneliness and the hopelessness of depression, and help you find new meaning and purpose.
  - **Therapy** helps you work through stressful life changes, heal from losses, and process difficult emotions. It can also help you change negative thinking patterns and develop better coping skills. **Cognitive behaviour therapy, interpersonal therapy, problem solving therapy and reminiscence therapy** are treatments whose efficacy is supported by empirical research
  - **Support groups** for depression, illness, or bereavement connect you with others who are going through the same challenges. They are a safe place to share experiences, advice, and encouragement.

# THINGS TO DO THAT MAY AN OLDER ADULT WITH DEPRESSION

- **Invite your loved one out.** Depression is less likely when people's bodies and minds remain active. Suggest activities to do together that your loved one used to enjoy: walks, an art class, a trip to the movies—anything that provides mental or physical stimulation.
- **Schedule regular social activities.** Group outings, visits from friends and family members, or trips to the local community or senior centre may help combat isolation and loneliness. Be gently insistent if your plans are refused: depressed people often feel better when they're around others.
- **Plan and prepare healthy meals.** A poor diet can make depression worse, so make sure your loved one is eating right, with plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and some healthy protein at every meal.
- **Encourage the person to follow through with treatment.** Depression usually recurs when treatment is stopped too soon, so help your loved one keep up with their treatment plan. If it isn't helping, look into other medications and therapies.
- **Watch for suicide warning signs.** Seek immediate professional help if you suspect that your loved one is thinking about suicide.

# WHY IT MATTERS, WHY WE NEED TO BE AWARE

**Depression is not**  
a normal part of aging,  
a sign of weakness, or  
a character flaw.

If you think you or a loved one  
might have depression, talk  
to a health care provider.



# WORLD ALZHEIMER DAY – SEPTEMBER 21, 2021



## World Alzheimer Report 2021

Journey through the diagnosis of dementia

The World Alzheimer Report 2021, to be published in September 2021, will focus on the crucial topic of diagnosis.



# RESOURCES

- **Depression in Older Adults: Signs, Symptoms, Treatment:** *Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, M.A. and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.*, July 2021 | <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/depression-in-older-adults.htm>
- **Depression in Older Adults. You Are Not Alone!:** Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH) March, 2016 | <https://ccsmh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CCSMH-8.5-x-11-DEP-RI-1.pdf>
- **Depression in Older Adults**, What older adults, their families and friends need to know: CAMH, 2021 | <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/depression-in-older-adults>

# Thank You

For more information, or if you have questions about Alzheimer's disease or related dementias, please contact us!

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## ***HELP FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW***

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