

# VISIONS

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

## MyPyramid: The New USDA Food Guide



The USDA has recently released an updated Food Guide Pyramid called MyPyramid. It is based on the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The new MyPyramid provides a more personalized approach to healthy eating and physical activity than the former Food Guide Pyramid.

MyPyramid still puts foods into food groups. Each of the triangles in the pyramid represents a food group. From left to right, they are: grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk, and meat & beans. The amount of each food group YOU should eat depends on your age, gender, and activity level—these factors determine how many calories you need for a healthy weight. Twelve calorie levels are included for males and females ages 2 to 76+ with activity levels of sedentary, moderately active, and active.

Here's a little information describing the concepts behind the new pyramid and to help you navigate the new MyPyramid.

### Variety

MyPyramid includes 6 colorful triangles representing the 5 major food groups and oils. This is to show that foods from all groups are needed each day for good health. Each food group makes a distinct contribution to meeting your nutri-

tional needs. All are needed. Oils are included for the first time because research shows that vegetable oils and oils in some fish contain fatty acids, which are important for good health.

### Moderation

Notice that the food group triangles that make up MyPyramid are wider at the bottom and get narrower as they go toward the tip. The wider base represents foods with little or no solid fats or added sugar. It is wider to show that you should choose these foods more often. The narrow top area represents foods within each group that contain more added sugars and solid fats. These are foods to choose in moderation.

Take vegetables, for example. One food at the base is plain, steamed broccoli. Farther up might be broccoli with lemon juice and olive oil. Above that might be broccoli with cheese sauce. And, finally, near the tip might be deep fried, breaded broccoli with cheese sauce. Foods might stack up in the grains triangle like this: plain oatmeal, then sweetened oatmeal with raisins, oatmeal cookies, and at the top, oatmeal cookies with chocolate chips and frosting! Get the picture?

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## Children's Health Summit: Fighting Back Against Childhood Obesity

*Marilou Rochford, MA, CFLE,  
FCHS Educator, Cape May County*

The Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS) Department is pleased to announce Children's Health Summits will take place throughout the state over the coming year. So far, Summits have been held in these counties: Cape May (pilot program), Atlantic, Passaic, and Union. More are planned for other areas of the state. These 1-day conferences provide a variety of continuing education workshops and exhibits for professionals who work with children and families. Workshops are also suitable for parents.

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Childhood obesity is the focus of this year's Summits because it affects so many families and has serious physical and emotional consequences. Since 1980, obesity rates have doubled among young children and tripled among adolescents. Of children and teens aged 6 to 19 years, 15% (about 9 million kids) are overweight.

The goals of the Summits are to raise community awareness about childhood obesity and establish a community network to work together to prevent this problem.

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Specifically, Summit participants have the opportunity to:

- Explore the causes of childhood obesity.
- Identify the physical and emotional health consequences of childhood obesity.
- Describe how healthy weight is determined for children.
- Investigate the components of a nutritious diet and how to eat healthy in a fast food world.
- Examine the health benefits of physical activity and ways to promote physical activity with youth.
- Describe the influence of school health programs on children's success.
- Identify local resources and the services they provide.
- Network with other adults who share similar concerns regarding the health of children.

Workshop topics include: Staying Healthy in A Super-sized World; Helping Kids Cope: Finding Workable Family Solutions for Addressing the Emotional Issues of Overweight Children; Health and Student Achievement—Understanding the Mind-Body Connection; Active Kids/Healthy Kids—Exploring the physical, cognitive, and emotional benefits of exercise. In addition, a working lunch provides roundtable discussions with local resource partners.



Contact your county Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension office to learn more about upcoming Summits!

**MyPyramid...***continued from front page.***Activity**

The person climbing the steps on the MyPyramid represents YOU being active. For the first time, the Pyramid makes physical activity recommendations.

- ▲ To lower your risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer, include at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week (above and beyond normal daily activity).
- ▲ To manage your weight and prevent unhealthy weight gain, included 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days of the week.

To lose weight or keep the weight off, include 90 minutes of moderate exercise every day.

To get enough exercise, many people will need to increase their motivation and shift their schedules. Remember, physical activity does make you feel better and usually helps you look better. You don't need to join a gym, but for some people, that commitment works really well. Walking is one of the best exercises. Gardening is great exercise, too. (So is cleaning house, but not nearly as much fun.)

**Gradual Improvement**

Don't try to make the changes recommended by MyPyramid overnight. Just take it one small step at a time—steps to a healthier you can be important to making great improvements in your health.

**Make it work for YOU!**

To learn more, go to [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov).

Here you'll see how much of each of the food groups is recommended for you.

You'll also find meal patterns, menu suggestions, and work sheets that will help you identify the changes to make. Chal-

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## Health Literacy: Help Yourself to Better Health

**Andrew Pleasant, Ph.D.,  
Assistant Professor, Human Ecology**

Low health literacy is an important problem for doctors and patients alike.

One sign of low health literacy is that people often understand and use half or less of what their doctor tells them.

Visits to a doctor can be stressful. We are usually not feeling well and worried about our health when we visit a doctor. That makes it difficult to listen well and remember what we heard.

The doctor also has worries. These may include problems with insurance companies, the need to study the latest research, and a lack of time. Also, doctors face the challenge of quickly understanding each patient's problem. All these problems challenge our and our doctor's health literacy.

### **What is health literacy?**

You are not alone if you find reading newspapers, completing forms, or balancing a checkbook difficult. That is true for about 90 million adults in this country.

Being able to read about health is only one part of health literacy. Health literacy also includes knowing:

- how science works and that the 'best science' can change rapidly,
- how to find your way through the complex health care system, and that
- health can mean different things to different people.

Being health literate also means knowing that your choices can hurt the health of other people. Second-hand smoke is an example of this part of health lit-

eracy. More of us now know that cigarette smoke threatens people who do not smoke. Knowing that has helped many people decide to stop smoking. That is how health literacy can make us healthier.

Health literacy is how we find, understand, judge, and use health information to make better choices, reduce health risks, and increase quality of life. Both patients and doctors need to improve their health literacy.

### **Why is health literacy important?**

Low health literacy has many costs. People with lower health literacy are often:

- less healthy,
- less likely to make use of health screenings,
- less likely to visit a doctor as soon as they should,
- more likely to be hospitalized,
- unable to understand their treatments as well as others, and
- less likely to stick with treatments.

One study found that people on Medicare with the lowest reading skills had health care costs of \$10,000 more per year than the average. Another study estimated that low health literacy costs \$73 billion a year, mainly because of extra and longer hospital stays.

### **What can you do?**

Information about health and medicine is often very difficult. No one should feel ashamed for not understanding what a doctor tells them or gives them to read. Do not be afraid to ask your

doctor to explain without using words they learned in medical school.

While it is not a perfect solution, one organization recommends we ask doctors:

- what is my main problem?
- what do I need to do?
- why is it important for me to do this?

However, we all know that asking a doctor a question doesn't always mean you will get a clear answer. These questions will also not give you important information about any alternative treatments. Ask your doctor to help you understand well enough so that you can later explain what the doctor said to your family and friends. This will help you and your doctor improve health literacy skills.

Also, it can sometimes help to bring a friend or family member to the doctor's office with you. Two people listening and asking questions are better than one, especially if you are not feeling well.

Improving health literacy requires work but it will make you a better partner in your own health care and help you help yourself to better health.



## Teaching Kids to Step It Up a Notch

**Marilou Rochford, MA, CFLE,  
FCHS Educator, Cape May  
County**

The way kids eat and the way kids play has changed and has put them at risk for becoming overweight. The problem of overweight children has become a national epidemic. About 15% of the nation's children and adolescents are overweight and these numbers continue to increase. According to the 2003–2004 NJ Childhood Weight Status Report released by the NJ Department of Health & Senior Services, 38% of New Jersey's 6th graders are either overweight (18%) or obese (20%). It is important that we address this problem.

### **Technology and Inactivity**

Modern technology has made our lives easier. Inventions like remote controls, video games, riding lawn mowers, and dishwashers save us time and energy. We drive the car even if our destination is a block away! These conveniences mean less physical activity.

Childhood obesity and an inactive lifestyle go hand in hand. More than half of all children in the U.S. get too little exercise and physical activity drops sharply during adolescence. Generally, kids who are physically inactive at home are not active elsewhere. They also tend to shy away from organized activities. Many times, overweight children want to get involved but feel embarrassed and awkward.

### **Consequences of Childhood Obesity**

Obesity causes serious risks for children's physical and emotional

well-being. Overweight kids face health issues like Type II Diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and sleep apnea. Emotionally, overweight children suffer isolation and lower self-esteem. They are at greater risk for suicide. Think about how kids feel who are bullied or teased simply because they are overweight.

The cost of obesity to our society also is a cause for great concern. In 2000, obesity-related issues cost the U.S. \$117 billion, an amount that will grow tremendously as today's overweight children become overweight adults. Obesity often tracks into adulthood which makes prevention and treatment essential for stopping the problem from escalating further. Parents, community leaders, and other caring adults can do a great deal to activate children and adults toward a healthier lifestyle. One simple suggestion is to start walking.

### **Walking is Worthwhile**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 30 minutes of physical activity per day for adults and 30 to 60 minutes daily for kids. Walking is a simple way to achieve these daily activity goals. Walk for 30 minutes or break it up into smaller time segments, for example: 3 walks for 10 minutes per walk.

Walking fits seamlessly into day-to-day life. Walking is a fun and life-long activity that just about everyone can do. It's simple, free, has no membership fees or dues, and requires no lessons. By walking regularly, adults set a good example. They also teach children that walking is an easy way to achieve a healthy life. It needs to be part of everyday life so they will embrace it as part of their normal day-to-day routine.

Walking offers a variety of health benefits.

- ✓ It strengthens and tones the muscles in your calves, thighs, hips, abdomen, and lower back.

- ✓ It increases energy.
- ✓ It improves overall health.
- ✓ It helps you sleep better.
- ✓ It reduces stress.
- ✓ It improves self-esteem.
- ✓ It's good for your heart.
- ✓ It's simple!
- ✓ It's free!
- ✓ It's fun!



### **Simple Ways to Increase Your Steps**

Start slowly and increase your steps a little at a time. Look for opportunities to do things in an active way throughout the day. Short sessions add up. Remember 30 minutes a day for adults and 30 to 60 minutes for kids. Look for ways that you can "step it up a notch". Here are some ideas.

- ✓ Park further away from the door when shopping or going to work.
- ✓ Walk or march in place while talking on the phone.
- ✓ Have walking meetings instead of sitting in a conference room.
- ✓ Take the stairs instead of the elevator at least for one floor.
- ✓ If you use public transportation, get off a stop or two early and walk the rest of the way.
- ✓ Schedule short walking breaks each hour and walk around your home or office for a few minutes. Get up from the computer, video game, or your desk and take a walking break.
- ✓ Schedule a weekly family walk. It's a chance to spend time together while getting fit.
- ✓ Walk your children to school periodically or start a "walking school bus" in your school district.

- ✓ Make a game out of it. Give family members pedometers and see if they can top the number of steps from one day or week to the next. Remember, 2000 steps equals about one mile.
- ✓ Walk the dog. Remind your child that caring for the dog means taking it on regular walks and helping it keep fit, too.
- ✓ Play some music and dance. Children love this!
- ✓ When shopping, take a brisk walk around the mall or store first.
- ✓ Avoid using valet parking.
- ✓ Park and walk inside instead of using the drive-through window at the bank, pharmacy, or restaurant.
- ✓ Put away the remote control and get up to change TV stations.
- ✓ Rather than simply going for a walk with children, make it an adventure. Choose a route with plenty of interest along the way—things to look for things to collect. Be ready to cut it short if stamina fades for the young ones.
- ✓ Remember to always put safety first. Walk in areas that are well lit and where there is little or no traffic. Walk with a buddy or a group. Wear appropriate clothing and carry identification. Take items that could help in an emergency like a flashlight, cell phone or whistle.

By leading a more active lifestyle, adults show children that they care. Children are great imitators. When they see their parents and other adults walking, they accept it as part of the normal routine. In time, it will become part of their schedules, too. Start walking. Do it for yourself and the children in your life. Even small steps will help in the fight against childhood obesity. Take a step forward and start on your way to a healthier lifestyle!

## 2005 - The Year of the Healthy Child

*Daryl Minch, M.ED., CFCS,  
FCHS Educator, Somerset County*

The U.S. Surgeon General, Richard Carmona, has announced that *The Year of the Healthy Child* will focus on improving the body, mind, and spirit of the growing child. "By improving the holistic health of our children, we can ensure a healthier population for the next generation." A healthy child begins before birth, so the Office of the Surgeon General will highlight steps that women should take to keep themselves healthy, especially when they are considering becoming pregnant. This includes eating a healthful diet, exercising, and eliminating tobacco and alcohol use.

Other recommendations include:

- Preparing a family health tree.
- Increasing folic acid intake for women who may become pregnant to prevent neural tube defects.
- Getting regular pre-natal care.
- Meeting early childhood development needs such as providing immunizations and opportunities for physical activity; preventing obesity, illness, injury, child abuse, drug and alcohol use; and promoting safe teen driving.
- Promoting the mental health of children and adolescents.
- Working to capture the enthusiasm of children and teens by promoting volunteerism, civic responsibility, and patriotism.

What is Family and Community Health Sciences in New Jersey doing to support this effort? Our *Living Well New Jersey* initiative includes educational programs on childhood obesity prevention, healthy

lifestyles, food allergies and food safety, and reducing asthma triggers. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP) also focus on the nutritional health of children and their families. Together we make a difference in the lives of New Jersey children and families.

For more information:

<http://surgeongeneral.gov/>



### MyPyramid...

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lunge yourself—make one positive change. Keep it up. Then, in a week or so, add another positive change. Steady, gradual positive changes will lead to improved health!

\* Adapted by Carol Byrd-Bredbenner, Extension Specialist in Nutrition from an article by Linda Drake, Nutritionist and EFNEP Program Director, University of Connecticut.

## Radon, Your Home, and Your Health



**Joseph Ponessa, Ph.D.,  
Extension Specialist in  
Housing, Indoor  
Environment, & Health**

Most of my work involves the indoor environment and health risks. An important part of teaching this topic is to rank the various indoor pollutants according to their health risks. This helps people to set priorities and focus on the areas that will provide the greatest risk reduction. In terms of numbers of deaths, the most important indoor pollutant is radon. Radon causes some 22,000 excess lung cancers in the U.S. each year. (Tobacco use, for comparison, kills 430,000 Americans each year—nearly 20 times as many as radon.) Recently, the Surgeon General of the United States has identified radon as a major health threat that deserves special attention.

### **What is radon?**

It is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that can collect in homes. It increases the risk of lung cancer. The good news is that radon levels in your home can be measured easily. (This involves setting out a small sampling device in your home for a period of time, and then mailing it to the lab for analysis. Also, most radon problems are readily fixed. (This usually involves installing a pipe that vents out gases from beneath the basement slab.) Typical repair costs are in the range of \$1,000–\$1,500. In the state of New Jersey, contractors who do such work must be certified.

**Should we be worried about radon here in New Jersey? Yes!**

Many counties in the northwest part of the state are classified as high risk areas. A few homes there have shown some of the highest radon levels ever measured. Even in low-risk counties in South Jersey, there are a few communities in the high risk group.

While most homes don't have a problem, a significant number have radon levels that exceed the concentration limits set for uranium mines! Would you like to live in such a home? Do you live in such a home? There is only one way to find out if your home has a problem. You must test, and testing is both easy and inexpensive. Do it today!

For information:

NJ radon hotline: 1-800-648-0394

Radon fact sheets, sources of test kits, contractor lists; questions answered.

On the web:

[www.nj.gov/dep/rpp/radon/](http://www.nj.gov/dep/rpp/radon/)

Radon information is also available at:

[www.healthyindoorair.org/oct\\_month.htm](http://www.healthyindoorair.org/oct_month.htm)

and

[www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/).

For a New Jersey radon risk map showing individual municipalities' risks:

[www.nj.gov/dep/rpp/radon/radonin.htm](http://www.nj.gov/dep/rpp/radon/radonin.htm)

**Correction to Fall 2004 article: *Portion Distortion* by Schwartz. (17:2, p.7).**

We apologize for omissions in the article. Unfortunately, the fractions became "symbols" during the printing process. The corrected section on using objects to estimate portion size is below. - Editors

Research has shown that using familiar objects as a reference, such as a baseball equaling 1 cup, a tennis ball, which is equal in size to 1/2 cup, or 1/2 tennis ball, equaling 1/4 cup,

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## Just the Facts on Trans Fats

**Haylee Boyle, RD,  
FCHS Program Associate,  
Sussex County**

Since 1900, heart disease has been the number one cause of death among American men and women. While the effects of saturated fat and cholesterol and the risk for heart disease have been known for some time, it has taken nearly 100 years to recognize the role that trans fatty acids (trans fat) play. Several large studies suggest that high intake of trans fat increase the risk for heart disease. Similar to saturated fat and dietary cholesterol, trans fats raise LDL's and total cholesterol in the blood. In addition, trans fats may lower HDL cholesterol (the cholesterol that protects against heart disease). High total cholesterol and high LDL (bad) cholesterol, along with low HDL (good) cholesterol, are major risk factors for heart disease.

Trans fats are formed during the commercial process that changes liquid, unsaturated oils into solid fats. This process is called hydrogenation. Food manufacturers prefer to use hydrogenated fats because they stay fresh longer than oils.

Now that the risks associated with trans fats have been identified, many food manufacturers now are looking for new hydrogenation methods, types of oil, and other ingredients to reduce or eliminate trans fat. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recommended that Americans limit their intake of trans fats. They also have issued new food labeling regulations that will assist consumers in protecting themselves against heart disease.

Beginning January 1, 2006, consumers will see trans fats on the Nutrition Facts label on packages of foods that contain more than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving.

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**Just the Facts...**

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Trans fat will appear under saturated fat on the Nutrition Facts label. Trans fat does not have to be listed if the total fat in a food is less than 0.5 grams per serving and no claims are made about fat, fatty acids, or cholesterol content.

Providing trans fat information on the new label helps make consumers more aware of their intake. The FDA estimates that by 2009, trans fat labeling could prevent up to 1,200 cases of heart disease and up to 500 deaths each year. There are no reported benefits of consuming trans fats and they have adverse health effects, so consumers should strive to limit their intake.

Take the following steps to reduce trans fats, saturated fats, and cholesterol intake:

- ★ Limit foods high in trans fats including: hard margarines, shortening, crackers, candy, cookies, fried foods, fast foods, baked goods, and processed foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils.
- ★ Check the Nutrition Facts label and limit foods containing high amounts of trans fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
- ★ Replace saturated and trans fats with unsaturated fats. Unsaturated fats are beneficial to the heart when consumed in moderation.
- ★ Limit fast food. These foods are typically high in trans fats, saturated fats, and cholesterol.
- ★ Increase consumption of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

For more information:

[www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/transfat/background.html](http://www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/transfat/background.html)

## Listeriosis: Pregnant Women Need to Be Careful

**Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS,  
FCHS Educator, Union County**

Pregnant women are at high risk for getting sick from *Listeria*, a harmful bacteria found in many foods. *Listeria* can lead to a disease called *Listeriosis* that can cause miscarriage, premature delivery, serious sickness, or death of a newborn baby. Each year, 2,500 Americans get *Listeriosis*. If you are pregnant, handle food safely to make sure you are not a victim!

To prevent *Listeriosis*, the USDA recommends that pregnant women NOT eat:

- ✦ hot dogs, luncheon meats, or other deli meats UNLESS they are reheated until steaming hot!
- ✦ refrigerated pâté, meat spreads from a deli counter, or smoked seafood found in the refrigerated section of the grocery store. Foods that do not need refrigeration like canned tuna and canned salmon are safe to eat—just be sure to refrigerate any leftovers.
- ✦ foods made with unpasteurized (raw) milk or drink any unpasteurized milk.
- ✦ protein rich salads prepared in a food store such as ham, chicken, egg, tuna, or seafood salads.
- ✦ soft cheese such as Feta, queso blanco, queso fresco, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined, and Panela UNLESS the label states they were made with pasteurized milk.

To keep foods safe from *Listeria*, it is important to keep the refrigerator clean and between 32° and 40°F. Use a refrigerator thermometer to check the temperature. Make sure spills are cleaned up right away and juices from packages of lun-

cheon meats, hot dogs, raw meat, chicken, and fish are cleaned up with soap and water. Use any pre-cooked or ready-to-eat foods soon after purchase. Always carefully wash your hands after touching unheated luncheon meats and hot dogs, and raw meat, fish, poultry, or their juices.

Early signs of *Listeriosis* may be fever, chills, muscle aches, diarrhea, and/or upset stomach. These symptoms may be followed by a stiff neck, headache, convulsions, or loss of balance. This illness mimics the stomach flu and symptoms may not occur for several weeks, so a person may not realize they have *Listeriosis*. The best way to prevent this disease is to handle food carefully. But, if a pregnant woman has these symptoms, she should call her health care provider immediately.

For More Information:

[www.fsis.usda.gov/fact\\_sheets/foodborne\\_illness\\_&\\_disease\\_fact\\_sheets/](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/foodborne_illness_&_disease_fact_sheets/)

### **Portion Distortion...correction**

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can help with portion control. Using these objects may help reduce “portion distortion.” Here are examples of standard portions:

#### Grains

1 hockey puck = 1/2 bagel

1 tennis ball = 1/2 cup rice

#### Protein Foods

1 deck of cards = 3 oz. of meat

1 golf ball = 2 Tbsp. of peanut butter

#### Dairy

1/2 golf ball = 2 oz. cubed cheese

#### Fruits & Vegetables

1 baseball = medium piece of fruit

1/2 tennis ball = 1/4 cup of dried fruit

1 baseball = 1 cup salad greens

## ***Extension Living Well Celebrations Throughout the Land***

Throughout the state people honored the work of Family and Community Health Sciences professionals with *Extension Living Well* celebrations in March. The New Jersey Senate and General Assembly issued a Joint Legislative Resolution and 8 Boards of Chosen Freeholders issued proclamations in these counties: Cape May, Cumberland, Hunterdon, Monmouth, Passaic, Somerset, Union, and Warren. In Washington, D.C., the U.S. Senate also issued a resolution.

*Extension Living Well* celebrations encourage residents to take advantage of FCHS educational opportunities that promote health. Living well is about making choices in our daily lives. Even small changes, like eating less fat, eating more vegetables, or walking 10 more minutes a day can help. Local exhibits and workshops during *Extension Living Well* celebrations raised awareness as well as provided specific ideas for improving health.

*Daryl Minch, Visions Co-Editor*

# Living Well

- Staying Healthy
- Raising Healthy Kids
- Eating Right
- Creating Healthy Environments

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**[www.rcrc.rutgers.edu](http://www.rcrc.rutgers.edu)**



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