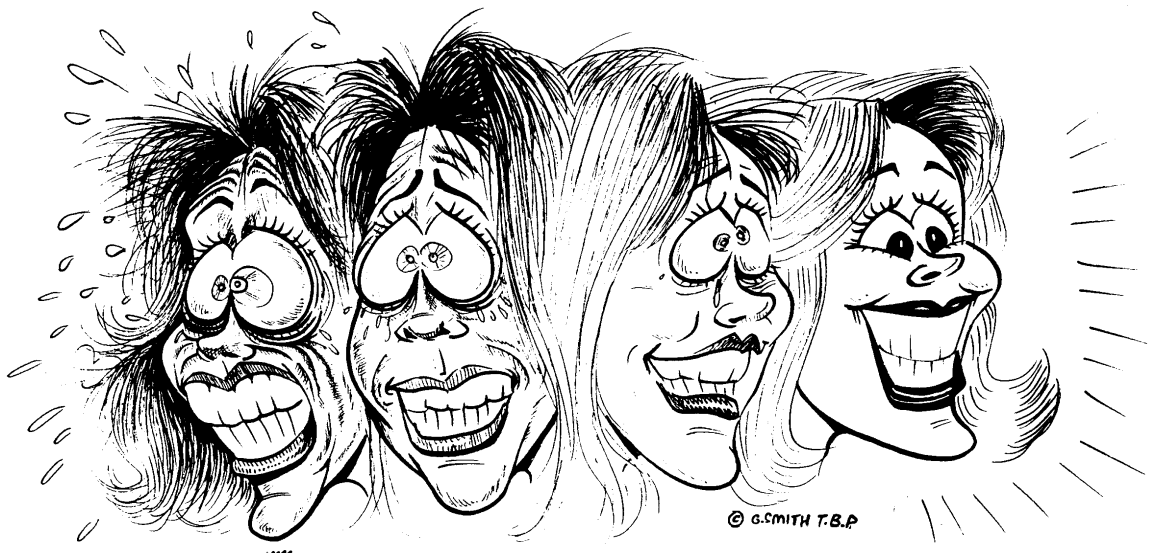


Personal Stress Management



Lesson 2: Personal Stress Management

Introduction

This lesson will —

1. Identify personal sources of stress.
2. Explore strategies for reducing stress
3. Improve your ability to cope with stress through developing effective stress management skills.

Objectives

By the end of this lesson you should be able to —

1. Demonstrate an increased understanding of personal stress by identifying ten stressors in your life.
2. Express five ways to manage personal stress.
3. Use one new activity to effectively balance the stress in your life.



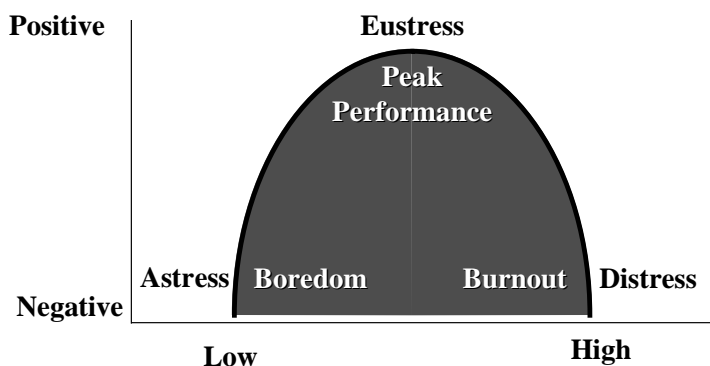
Getting Started

What is Stress?

Stress is anything that places a demand on us physically, mentally, or emotionally. It makes us change the normal way we live.

Most of us think of stress as a crisis, but not all stress is bad. Without stress (astress), life would be boring. There would be no growth and no

What is Stress?



change. With too much stress (distress), we reach overload. Our ability to cope becomes limited, and we feel burned out. However, some stress is good. It can provide an opportunity to bring about positive changes in our lives. We call this eustress. This type of stress leads to peak performance.

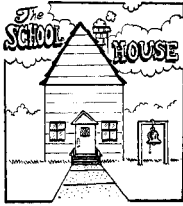
Take a few moments to write down ten stressors in your life on *Worksheet 2.1*. Examples are finances, work hours, illness, conflict with co-workers, etc. Now rank them, with "1" being the most stressful and "10" the least stressful.

Worksheet 2.1

My Top Stressors	
Rank	Stressor

Instructor: Have each person share these with another class participant. Allow 10 minutes for the entire exercise.

You may discover that you share many of the same stressors with others. Sometimes knowing we all share similar problems helps us feel better about ourselves and our situation.



The School House

Adding Spice to Your Life!

Stress is the spice of life. Without stress, life would be boring. Productivity would decrease. Excitement in living would dwindle. Believe it or not, we often seek out stressful (or thrilling) experiences to heighten our sense of excitement and adventure in life. Roller coaster rides are stressful, yet some people flock to them. Most movie plots center around the hero or heroine's attempts to get out of a conflict or stressful situation. Athletes talk of getting "psyched up" before a match to help boost their performance. However, most of us view stress as negative and something to avoid. Let's look at the



negative side of stress.

What are the Signs of Stress?

Stress brings about many physical and emotional changes. Your heart rate and breathing increase. Your muscles tense. The adrenaline begins to flow. In general, your body is getting geared up to meet a challenge. Worksheet 2.2 shows some of the physiological, emotional/mental, and behavioral reactions to stress.

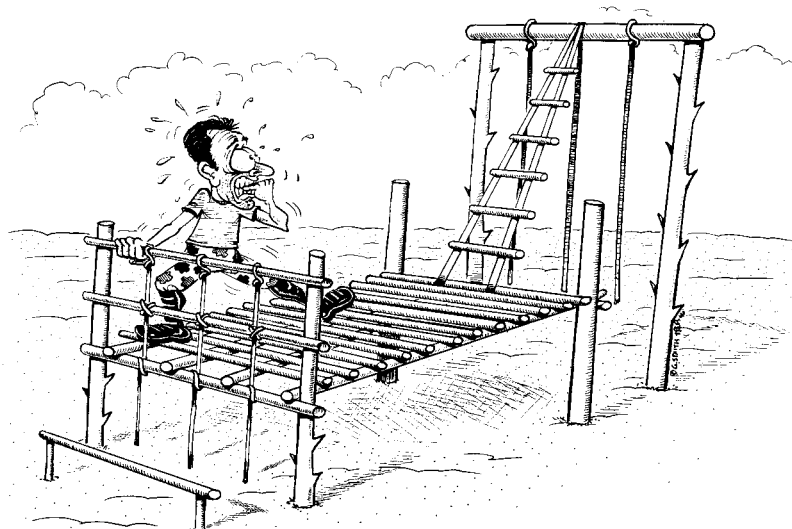
What are the Signs of Stress?

Physiological	Emotional/Mental	Behavioral
Pounding heart Rapid breathing Sweaty palms Cold hands and feet Lack of energy Headaches Muscle tension Sleep difficulties Stomach disturbances	Irritability Nervous, edgy Lack of patience Crying Losing temper Worrying Emotional sensitivity Memory lapse Lack of concentration Increase in careless errors Negative attitude Pre-occupation	Sleeping more Sleeping less Eating more Eating less Angry outbursts Withdrawing from others

Take a moment to look back over the lists. Perhaps you know of some other way you or someone you know responds to stress. Write these down in the space at the bottom of each list.

The Eye of the Beholder

How a person reacts to a stressor depends on their own constitution, temperament, past experiences, training, and a number of other factors. However, probably the two factors that most affect how we react to stress is how we perceive the stressor and our own ability to handle the stressor successfully. For some, jumping out



of perfectly good airplanes is extremely anxiety arousing. They doubt their own ability to cope successfully with this unnatural situation. However, others find parachuting exciting and thrilling. They may experience some fear, but do not doubt their ability to cope. Military obstacle courses are often called “Confidence Courses”. They stress us by presenting novel situations, which upon successful completion expand our confidence in our own abilities to meet these challenges successfully. Tough, realistic training is one of the best ways to help soldiers develop resistance to the effects of stress on the battlefield. It builds confidence in the soldier’s ability to operate in a combat environment.

Can you have too much stress?

When stress is too high or lasts too long, some of the negative effects of stress may be felt. These include —

- Depression
- Ulcers
- Headaches
- Hypertension
- Anger/Irritability
- Weight Gain/Loss
- Fatigue
- Spill Over Into Family or Work



Granted, the effects of stress in your life may not be felt immediately. They tend to accumulate. However, over the years stress may reduce your immune system’s functioning which may lead to some of the effects listed above as well as physical illnesses.

How Much Stress Is Too Much?

Take about ten minutes and complete the Holmes-Rahe Stress Test (Worksheet 2.3). This test is based on the fact that stress effects tend to accumulate over time. To score this test, add up the points assigned to each of the positive and negative life events you have experienced within the past 12 months. The higher your score, the more likely you are to develop a significant physical illness within the next year--all because of the effects of stress on your body. In the next section, we will discuss ways to reduce the effects of stress.

Good and Bad — It All Adds Up

Instructions: Score yourself on this *Life Change Test**. Check only those events which you have experienced in the past year. Add the points assigned to each life event.

Life Event	Value	Life Event	Value
Death of spouse	100	Change in responsibilities at work	29
Divorce	73	Trouble with in-laws	29
Marital separation	65	Outstanding personal achievement	28
Jail term	63	Wife begins or stops work	26
Death of close family member	63	Begin or end school	26
Personal injury or illness	53	Change in living conditions	25
Marriage	50	Revision of personal habits	24
Fired at work	47	Trouble with boss	23
Marital reconciliation	45	Change in work hours or conditions	20
Retirement	45	Change in residence	20
Change in health of family member	44	Change in schools	20
Pregnancy	40	Change in recreation	19
Sex difficulties	39	Change in church activities	19
Gain of new family member	39	Change in social activities	18
Business readjustment	39	Mortgage or loan less than \$10,000	17
Change in financial state	38	Change in sleeping habits	16
Death of close friend	37	Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change to different line of work	36	Change in eating habits	15
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	Vacation	13
Mortgage over \$80,000	31	Christmas	12
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	Minor violations of the law	11
		Total Score for 12 Months	

The more change you have, the more likely you will suffer a decline in health. Of those who scored over 300 "life change units", 80 percent have a chance of a serious health change. With 150-299 life change units, you have a 50 percent chance of getting sick in the near future. With less than 150 life change units, your chances drop to 30 percent.

*Adapted from DA PAM 350-18, May 1983 (Original Source: Holmes, T.H. & Rahe, R.H. (1967). "The social readjustment rating scale". *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 11, pp. 213-18.



Skill Building

There are many strategies you can use to reduce stress. Worksheets 2.4 and 2.5 show two different styles used by many people to control their stress. List the advantages and disadvantages of using each approach.

Worksheet 2.4

Hoping that the stressful situation will go away.	
Advantages	
Disadvantages	

Worksheet 2.5

“Work hard and drive on” style of stress management.	
Advantages	
Disadvantages	

Both styles may help to reduce stress levels. They both have advantages as well as disadvantages. The first is an avoidance technique that works occasionally and for stressful events of short duration. Many situations do resolve on their own as attested to by this quote:

“I sometimes suspect that half our difficulties are imaginary and that if we kept quiet about them they would disappear.”
Robert Lynd

(Phillips, 1993)

So, at times it may be helpful to “just let things go.” However, this is heresy to the “Work Hard and Drive On” style.

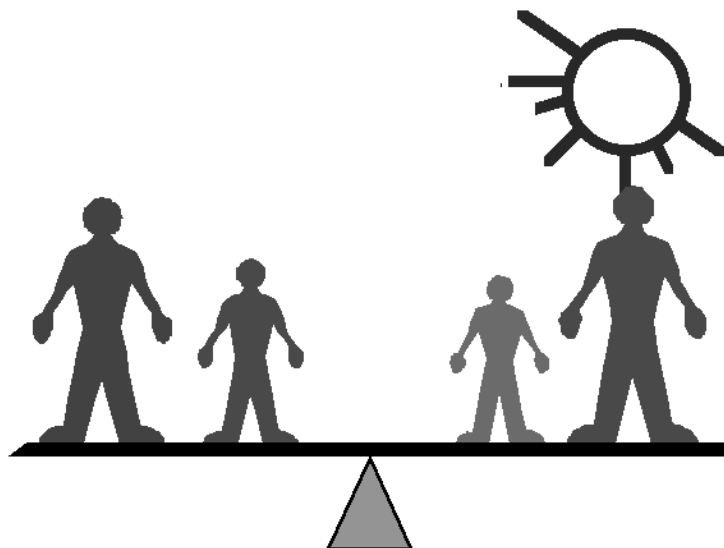
The “Work Hard and Drive On” style may also work for situations that are short lived and when relationship issues are not of concern. This style is commonly used by individuals with Type-A personalities. It has an advantage of helping the person feel more in control of the situation. However, it tends to lead to burn-out—not only for the individual, but also for those who live or work with him or her. However, when the stressful situation continues over a longer duration, both styles tend to lose their effectiveness. One key may be in adjusting your style to match the situations. This is the idea behind the serenity prayer.

The Serenity Prayer

Lord, help me to change
the things I can change,
to live with the things
I can't change,
and to have the wisdom
to know the difference.

Though each stress management style may have advantages, there is a way of coping with stress that may help overcome the disadvantages found in each.

Its a Balancing Act



The key to managing stress is in maintaining a balance. This means balancing in all dimensions of life: Work vs. Play, Self vs. Others, Inactivity vs. Activity, and so on. When things are out of balance, then our ability to effectively manage stressful situations becomes impaired.

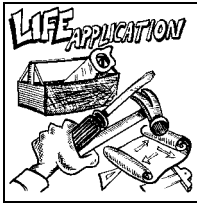
How Can I Keep It All In Balance?

Take a moment to complete the exercise in Worksheet 2.6. Follow the example in the first row. If too much time is spent at work, then family and social life may suffer. Your ability to concentrate may be impaired and your ability to see potential solutions to problems at work may be constricted. On the other side, if too much time is spent at “Play”, work may suffer, deadlines are missed, and the mission may not be accomplished in a timely manner. One row is left blank, so you can write in other dimensions of your life where keeping a balance is important to you.

Worksheet 2.6

← Too Much	Dimension	Too Much →
Family and social life suffer Divorce Withdrawal by friends	Work vs. Play	Lost productivity at work Missed deadlines Mission delayed
Stepping on others	Aggressive vs. Passive	Being stepped on
Too self-centered	Self vs. Others	Lose self
Increased risk of injury	Exercise vs. Inactivity	Sedentary diseases
Excessive weight loss	Dieting vs. Indulgence	Obesity

	Other	
--	-------	--



Life Application

Keeping life in balance requires effort. It means watching where your time is spent and making a conscious effort to maintain a balance. If the demands at work are high, those demands need to be balanced by enjoyable activities both at work and outside of work.



The following are some activities to help keep a balance in your life.

Exercise	Moderate exercise, at a pace where you can talk comfortably (physician approval recommended for males 40 or older, females 50 or older, or those who are not already participating in a regular exercise program).
Play	Participate in hobbies, sports, games, music, theater.
Social support	Build friendships, join a social or church group.
Mini-Vacations	Take short one to three minute breaks throughout the day to take a walk, stretch-in-place, take a few deep relaxing breathes, etc.
Keeping a Healthy Perspective	Read a humorous book, don't make a negative comment without proposing a constructive alternative.
Diet	Eat a balanced, nutritional meal to help keep you functioning at your best.
Assertiveness	Learn to say "No". Standing up for your own rights without violating the rights of others.
Skill Building	Learn more about your job and how to do it better.
Relaxation, Prayer, Meditation	Practice these effective stress relievers.

Look over the dimensions of life above. Highlight one area where you feel you could use more of a balance. Next, pick an activity from the list we just reviewed, from those suggested by the American Cancer Society (Worksheet 2.7), or one of your own ideas.

Worksheet 2.7

What Can Be Done to Reduce Stress.

(From the *American Cancer Society*)

- 1. Break down every big job into small components** so it doesn't become overwhelming to you. Make a list of the work you want to accomplish each day. Prioritize your list and work on accomplishing the top 3 items.
- 2. Do neck rolls frequently throughout the day** to relieve the stiffness and tightness in neck muscles. Let your shoulders drop. Release the tension.
- 3. Become more aware of your surroundings.** By deliberately slowing down your walk and conversation, you absorb more of your surroundings and reorient yourself to a slower pace.
- 4. Avoid being a perfectionist.** Put your best effort into whatever you are doing; then relax and don't worry about the results. Perfection implies unrealistic expectations. Perfectionists are hard to live with because of the excessive demands they make on themselves and others.
- 5. Temporarily remove yourself from the situation** when problems begin to overwhelm you. Once your mind is rested, you will see solutions.
- 6. Be assertive.** Take action and speak clearly and openly on your ideas and needs.
- 7. Take time out from your work.** Schedule regular vacations and opportunities to get away from it all. Try to plan these in such a way that they are long enough and frequent enough to allow you to relax and change your routine and pace.
- 8. Exercise regularly and moderately.** Research has suggested that those who exercise regularly, i.e., 3 to 4 times a week, tend to live longer and healthier lives than those who do not. Walk, run, bike, play sports.
- 9. Maintain a reasonable diet.** Three meals a day is important for all of us. A number of research studies have suggested that those who have 3 meals a day (especially those who eat breakfast) live longer and healthier lives. Avoid junk food and try to eat a balanced diet. Listen to your body and its reaction to your food intake. If you attend to your body's reactions, you will learn the importance of regular and balanced meals.
- 10. Develop outside interests and activities.** Total involvement in job or home responsibilities can produce total isolation and an obsession with work. Relax on weekends by doing something different from the pattern you have established during the week.
- 11. Think about something entirely different than work.** Close your eyes and visualize an extremely relaxing and peaceful scene. Try to see it as clearly and distinctly as you can in your mind's eye. Color in the trees and the ocean. Focus on color. Let yourself relax. Let the tension slip away. Take a breath--deeply and slowly.
- 12. Talk it out.** When things get to you, find someone you can talk to and confide in. Expressing your feelings has a purpose. It allows you to release the feelings of tension and anger that have built

up. Effective communication with others is a key factor in being able to cope with stress. Keep the channels of communication open with those close to you. Learn to talk about your frustrations and thoughts.

Make a plan to practice doing that activity at least once a day for a week. It is usually helpful to:

- Pick an activity that you think you will enjoy.
- Set aside a time during the day when you will do it.
- Come up with a plan for how you can avoid interruptions.
- Determine an alternate time or activity if you can't do the one you selected.

If you do not feel that the activity is helping you manage your stress better, feel free to change it or pick another. Refer back to Lesson 1 for additional help in making a plan for change.

Make a contract (Worksheet 2.8) with yourself and post it in a visible place as a reminder to practice the activity you selected.

Worksheet 2.8

Contract with Myself

I want to help myself keep more of a balance in my life. For the next seven days, I will _____
 each day at _____. If I am unable to do it at that
 (insert time)
 time, I will do it at _____. To prevent interruptions,
 (insert time)

I will _____

Signed: _____ Dated: _____

Stress is a crisis and an opportunity. How we perceive our situation plays a major role in the way stress affects our lives. Balance is important, including the need to relax and to not let the negative effects of stress continue to build throughout the day. Fortunately, there are many activities that can be done to help offset the negative effects of stress.

Over the next couple of weeks —

- ⇒ Continue to check on the balance in your life.
- ⇒ Seek out new and healthy ways to counter the stress in your life.
- ⇒ Use the tips provided by the American Cancer Society, *What Can Be Done to Reduce Stress?* (Worksheet 2.7).
- ⇒ And above all else, make it enjoyable.

The more an activity is enjoyable, the more you are likely to continue it.

Still drawing a blank?



There are *101 Stress Relievers* on the next page to help you discover new and exciting ways to manage stress.

101 Stress Relievers

Need a quick—or not so quick—stress-break? Fresh out of ideas? Try one of these:

Stop and look out the window.

Work a crossword puzzle.

ANGRY? TALK TO A FRIEND ABOUT IT.

Apologize for a mistake. **Meditate.**
Stand up and **stretch.**

Ask for help.

Call up an old friend. **Run.**

Change coffee break to exercise break.

Close your eyes. What do you see?

Count to ten—or 1000—before exploding.
Count your blessings—make a list.



Build a model ship.

TELL someone "I love you."
a joke. **STOP AND YAWN.**

DANCE
CLIMB A MOUNTAIN.

Cut back on caffeine.

WATCH A REALLY GOOD MOVIE.

Plan ahead.

EAT AN ORANGE SLOWLY, SEGMENT BY SEGMENT.

DAYDREAM spend your coffee break at the beach.

Do one thing at a time.

Eat a good breakfast.

Forgive someone.

Fly a kite.

Get a massage. Get a pet.

Find someone you're grateful to and thank them.

Go fishing.

Get a good night's sleep.

Get up fifteen minutes early.

Keep a journal of thoughts and feelings.

GO

for a brisk walk.
swimming.

to work a different way.

Hug a tree.

Hug someone you love.

LEARN TO SAY NO.

LOOK

at the big picture.
Lie in a hammock.
at the big picture.
closely at a flower, leaf, blade of grass or tree trunk.
off into the distance.



Lift weights.

Listen to the birds.

Make love.

WASH THE CAR.

Plant a flower.



Smell a rose.

READ SOMETHING FUNNY EVERY DAY.

Ride your bike to work.

Share feelings with someone.

...a cat in your lap.
...on some music.
...plants in your office.
...your feet up.

Play a round of golf.

Make a list. Then follow it.

- ✓ Take a child to the playground.
- ✓ Take a deep breath and let it all out.
- ✓ Take a leisurely stroll.
- ✓ Take a long bath.
- ✓ Take a nap.
- ✓ Take an herb tea break.
- ✓ Take one day at a time.
- ✓ Take the back roads.
- ✓ Take the stairs.
- ✓ Take time for the sunset—or sunrise.
- ✓ Take up knitting.

Massage your temples.

Quit smoking.

Write a poem.

Write a letter to the editor.

Roll your shoulders up and around in a circular motion.

Sit by a fountain or stream. Close your eyes and hear the water.

Practice Yoga.

Work out at the gym.

WEAR EARPLUGS WHEN IT'S NOISY.

Do a good deed.

TALK TO YOURSELF: "I CAN DO A GREAT JOB." "I CAN STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE."

Paint a peaceful scene—in your imagination.

Make time for play.

Spend an evening without TV.

Write...

down your fears.
down your dreams.
your congressman.

PRACTICE LAUGHING OUT LOUD.

Watch a cloud for 5 minutes. Watch an ant or other insect for 5 minutes.

Sit by a fire.



Turn cocktail hour into exercise hour.

Walk barefoot in the grass.

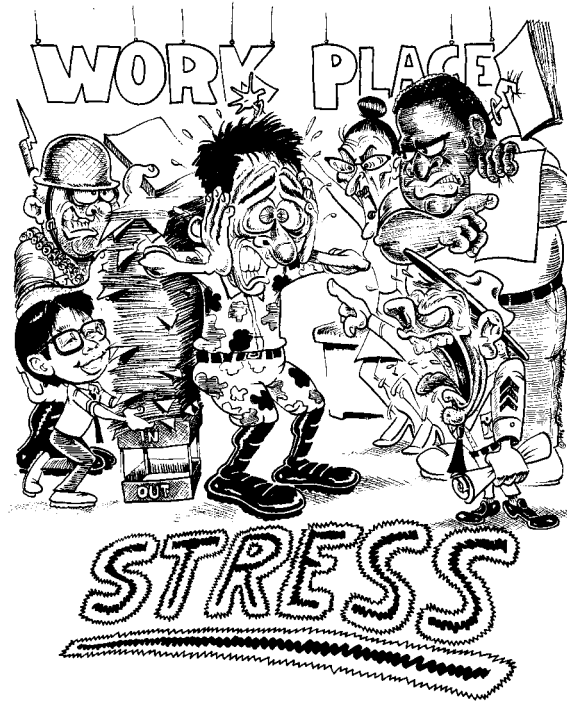
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CLASP YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD AND STRETCH YOUR SHOULDERS.



Stay Tuned

The next lesson will focus on another source of stress: Work place or Organizational stress. What is it? How does it prevent an organization from functioning effectively? Finally, what can be done to counter the effects of workplace strain and stress.



Give Us Feedback

Please take a moment to complete the feedback form provided and return it to your instructor or mail it to USACHPPM. This information helps us know how we are doing, so we can do a better job at providing helpful solutions for today's problems. Thank you.

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