

Officer Health & Well-Being

A healthy service is a
productive service





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Your health & well-being, our priority

Putting off that health check? Work, life, family taking a priority? Have a concern but not sure where to turn?

Our 'first steps' guidance is here to help you - in finding out more; where to go for help; and finding out the best ways to either get, or offer, support.

It's a fact that officers have to work longer, manage incidents with fewer resources, have higher workloads and take on more responsibility - all while maintaining a fit and healthy lifestyle required to pass the annual fitness test.

Ill health can affect anyone - some issues affect both sexes, while some are gender specific. Our aim here is to provide you with some useful information and preventative advice.

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Common problems for men and women

Alcohol

More than 90 per cent of people in the UK drink alcohol. In moderation, drinking alcohol isn't likely to be a problem, but drinking too much or at the wrong time can be harmful.

About one in three men and one in six women have a health problem caused by alcohol, and according to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, around one in 15 men and one in 50 women are physically addicted to alcohol.

Abuse of alcohol also leads to long term physical health problems such as liver disease and an increased risk of some cancers, as well as mental health problems such as depression, memory loss and brain damage.

More information is available from the Royal College of Psychologists, who produce a helpful leaflet, entitled [*Alcohol - what does it really cost?*](#)

For NHS guidance on drinking and alcohol, visit the NHS Choices webpages on [drinking and alcohol](#).

If you think you may have a reliance on alcohol, call Drinkline on 0300 123 1110.



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Blood pressure

It is thought that around 30% of people in England have high blood pressure, and many don't even know it. Though more than half of them are over 60, a large number are younger. Could you be one of them?

High blood pressure is common and often has no symptoms.

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked. Health professionals such as nurses, pharmacists and GPs can check your blood pressure with a simple test.

High blood pressure increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke, but there are things you can do to lower your blood pressure. For NHS guidance on blood pressure, visit the NHS Choices webpage on [healthy blood pressure](#).

Cancer

Cancer is a condition where cells in a specific part of the body grow and reproduce uncontrollably. The cancerous cells can invade and destroy surrounding healthy tissue, including organs.

There are over 200 different types of cancer, each with its own methods of diagnosis and treatment. You can find out more about specific types of cancer by visiting the NHS Choices webpage [Cancer information and useful links](#).

Breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in England and Wales and accounts for 30% of all cancers in women. The first symptom of breast cancer for many women is a lump in their breast; however 9 out of 10 breast lumps are benign, meaning they are not cancerous.

NHS Choices has more information on how breast cancer affects both [men](#) and [women](#). Most benign lumps are

- Areas of benign breast change, causing lumpiness that is more obvious just before a period, particularly in women over 35
- Cysts, which are sacs of fluid in the breast tissue and are quite common
- Fibro adenoma - a collection of fibrous glandular tissue.

These are more common in younger women.

- 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer at some point in their lives
- It's the most common cause of death from cancer in women
- There may be a relationship between shift work and breast cancer. The research suggests that



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the effect of altered light exposure at night on levels of melatonin or other hormones may have an impact on the risk of cancer

- Women who breast feed are statistically less likely to develop breast cancer than those who do not.

For further reading on breast cancer, try the websites of [Breast Cancer Care](#) and the NHS Choices webpages on [breast cancer awareness](#).

Common problems for men and women

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Cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) affect the heart and/or blood vessels, and can cause blood flow to the heart, brain or body to be reduced as the result of a blood clot or a build-up of fatty deposits within the lining of the body's arteries.

There are four main types of CVD: coronary heart disease, strokes, peripheral arterial disease and aortic disease.

Cardiovascular diseases can be prevented by implementing a number of lifestyle changes such as not smoking, eating a balanced and healthy diet, regular exercise and only drinking alcohol in moderation.

For more information, see the [NHS Choices webpages on CVD](#), or [Patient.co.uk's CVD webpages](#).

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition that affects both men and women, where bones become so porous and fragile that they can break very easily. This is a common condition that affects people of all ages, but particularly those in midlife. In the UK, one in two women and one in five men over the age of 50 will break a bone, commonly in the wrist, spine and hip, as a result of osteoporosis. These broken bones can result in considerable pain, disability and loss of independence.

After the age of 35, bone loss increases very gradually as part of the natural ageing process. This bone loss becomes more rapid in women for several years following the menopause and can lead to osteoporosis. The female hormone oestrogen has a protective effect on bones. During the menopause, the ovaries almost stop producing this hormone, reducing the protection it gives to bones.

The risk of developing osteoporosis can be reduced by taking plenty of weight bearing exercise and eating a well-balanced, calcium-rich diet, not smoking and reducing alcohol intake.

Should you have concerns that you may be at risk, seek the advice of your GP.

The NHS may be able to offer a scan which measures bone density. It is a simple, painless procedure and is recommended for those considered to be at high risk of breaking a bone due to osteoporosis and may need drug treatment to strengthen their bones.

The [National Osteoporosis Society](#) has more information on this topic.

Mental health

Sound mental health is as important as sound physical health, but can be more difficult to identify. One in four people will experience problems with their mental health at some point in their lives, so it's an issue that is likely to affect most people - whether personally, or through contact with others. Seeking advice and support is crucial to recovery and maintaining good mental health, and the sources of support available and working to tackle taboos related to mental illness are more accessible than ever.

Some key sources of advice and support include the [NHS Choices webpages on mental health](#), the [Mental Health Foundation](#) and [Mind](#).

There are many factors that contribute to mental wellbeing, but the following 12 tips for staying happy¹ may be helpful -

1. Keep physically active
2. Eat well
3. Only drink alcohol in moderation
4. Value yourself and others
5. Talk about your feelings
6. Keep in touch with friends and family
7. Care for others
8. Get involved, make a contribution
9. Learn a new skill
10. Do something creative
11. Take a break
12. Ask for help

Depression

Depression affects people in different ways and can cause a wide variety of symptoms.

They range from lasting feelings of sadness and hopelessness, to losing interest in the things you used to enjoy and feeling very tearful. Many people with depression also have symptoms of anxiety.

There can be physical symptoms too, such as feeling constantly tired, sleeping badly, having no appetite or sex drive and complaining of various aches and pains.

The severity of the symptoms can vary. At its mildest, you may feel persistently low in spirit, while at its most severe depression can make you feel suicidal and that life is no longer worth living. If you've been having feelings of extreme sadness, contact your GP.

Depression is a real illness with real effects on your work, social and family life. Treatment usually involves a combination of self-help, talking therapies and drugs.

Depression is more common in women, but men are far more likely to commit suicide. This may be because men are more reluctant to seek help.

More via NHS Choices webpages on [stress, anxiety and depression](#), [clinical depression](#), [Depression Alliance's website](#) and [Mind's webpages](#).

Stress-related illness

Stress, mental illness, back pain and musculoskeletal disorders are some of the largest causes of absence in both manual and non-manual workers.

Factors that help individuals counter stress include:

- being realistic their job
- having a good job 'fit'
- finding work meaningful
- being physically fit and eating well
- having a flexible coping style
- working for an organisation that has flexible working practices
- having social support

Moles

Check your moles regularly and be aware of any change in colour or shape, or if they start bleeding. Most changes are harmless and are due to a non-cancerous increase of pigment cells in the skin.

See your GP if a mole looks unusual or becomes itchy. It can then be checked and removed if necessary.

To minimise your risk of skin cancer, avoid exposure to the sun between 11am and 3pm. Cover up and use sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 15 when you're in the sun.

For more information, see the NHS Choices webpages on [moles](#), which also feature a [mole self-assessment tool](#).



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Musculoskeletal health

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as back pain are very common. According to a survey published in 2000, almost half (49 per cent) of the UK's adult population report low back pain lasting for at least 24 hours at some time in the year, and it's estimated that four out of every five adults (80 per cent) will experience back pain at some stage in their life.

As well as back pain, some work tasks can lead to employees experiencing problems with their upper limbs and neck. These may be caused by prolonged, repetitive tasks, such as when using computers or working on a production line.

The NHS advises that back pain isn't normally serious, and in most cases the best treatment is to stay active, with sensible levels of movement and using over-the-counter painkillers if needed. However seek early treatment and diagnosis.

See the NHS Choices webpages on [back pain](#) for further guidance.

Obesity

According to a recent research review, obesity has more than trebled in the UK during the past 25 years. Being obese or overweight is associated with a higher likelihood of suffering numerous chronic illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, joint disorders and certain types of cancer.

Obesity costs England 18 million sick days and 30,000 deaths every year. The increase in obesity appears to be due largely to a decrease in physical activity: calorie intake has changed little since 1980, but the UK now travels 25 per cent less on foot or by bicycle, and watches twice as much TV.

Healthy eating isn't just about maintaining a healthy weight. A balanced diet can help to prevent digestive disorders (e.g. constipation), iron deficiency (which can make people feel tired, irritable and less able to concentrate), bone conditions such as osteoporosis, and some cancers, such as those of the gastrointestinal tract as well as some hormone-related cancers (e.g. breast).

Some also suggest that deficiencies in some vitamins and minerals can increase the chance of feeling depressed. Obesity can have an impact on health and safety at work, for instance by affecting employees' fitness for physically active tasks and their ability to carry out tasks safely, such as manual handling.

The NHS' Change4Life campaign has some helpful tips on [how to be more active](#).

Smoking

The impact of smoking on health is well documented. It's one of the biggest causes of death and illness in the UK, resulting in 114,000 deaths a year. Smoking increases the risk of at least 50 medical conditions, some of which can be fatal. Others can cause irreversible, chronic damage to health.

These include:

- cancers of the lung, mouth, throat, larynx, oesophagus, bladder, kidney, pancreas and stomach
- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- chronic bronchitis and emphysema
- impotence and reduced fertility
- dementia
- digestive problems

See the NHS Choices webpages on [back pain](#) for further guidance.



Women's Health

Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is thought to be caused by infection with the human papilloma virus or HPV. The symptoms of cervical cancer aren't always obvious and it may not cause any symptoms at all until it has reached an advanced stage. The most common symptom of cervical cancer is bleeding from the vagina at other times than during a period. You may have bleeding;

- Between periods
- After or during sex
- At any time if you are past the menopause

Cervical cancer can be easily diagnosed and treated if caught early. Women aged 20 - 64 should be screened every 3 - 5 years. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in the under 35 age group. 2,700 women in the UK are diagnosed yearly. There are 24,000 severely abnormal cervical screens each year. Recently the NHS has commenced a vaccination programme for teenage girls who wish to be protected against HPV. [More here on NHS Choices](#).

Fertility Treatment (IVF)

Men and women sometimes need time off work for fertility treatment. Families going through fertility treatment will need support as this is a sensitive time and for the treatment to be successful, care needs to be taken.

- Check to see if your force has a fertility treatment policy which may include an agreement for paid leave for such treatment.
- Confidentiality should be respected

For further information visit [IVF explained](#) or the [Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority](#) webpages.

Lung cancer in women

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women in the UK. It kills almost 4,000 more women each year than breast cancer.

In 2008, more than 17,900 women were diagnosed with lung cancer in the UK, making it the third most common cancer in women after breast cancer and bowel cancer.

Lung cancer is declining among men, but the rate among women remains high. Between 1993 and 2008, cases of lung cancer in men fell by almost a third, while cases in women increased by 11%. [More here on NHS Choices](#).

Menopause

The menopause, also known as the 'change of life' is the end of menstruation. This means a woman's ovaries stop producing an egg every four weeks. She will no longer have a monthly period or be able to have children.

In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 52, although women can experience the menopause in their 30s or 40s.

If a woman experiences the menopause when she is less than 45 years of age, it is known as a premature menopause.

Menstruation (monthly periods) can sometimes stop suddenly when you reach the menopause. However, it is more likely that your periods will become less frequent, with longer intervals in between each one before they stop altogether. For more information see the links below.

The University of Nottingham were commissioned by the British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP) to research the experience of aging at work for women police officers aged 40 and over. The full report can be found [here](#) on the BAWP's website.

For further information on the symptoms, causes and treatments, see the NHS Choices webpages on [menopause](#).

Menstruation

Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS) can be very debilitating. Women can experience extreme emotions such as depression, aggression, tiredness, irritability and bloating. Changes in the levels of progesterone and oestrogen can cause headaches. According to the National Association for Pre Menstrual Syndrome (NAPMS), one woman in three will regularly experience PMS symptoms and one in twenty will have symptoms of severe PMS. Research suggests a number of factors can be associated with menstrual disorders including physically/mentally demanding work, exposure to environmental noise and hot/cold working conditions.

For further information, see the NHS Choices webpage on the [symptoms of PMS](#).



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Ovarian Cancer

Cancer of the ovary affects more than 6,500 women in the UK each year. It is the fifth most common cancer among women after breast cancer, bowel cancer, lung cancer and cancer of the uterus (womb).

Ovarian cancer is most common in women who have had the menopause (usually over the age of 50), but it can affect women of any age.

As the symptoms of ovarian cancer can be similar to those of other conditions, it can be difficult to recognise. However, there are early symptoms to look out for, such as persistent bloating, pain in the pelvis and lower stomach, and difficulty eating.

If you experience these symptoms, it is important to see your GP.

For more information, check out the webpages on ovarian cancer at [NHS Choices](#), [Ovarian Cancer Action](#) and [Cancer Research UK](#).

Post natal illness

Post natal illness (PNI) affects between 70,000 and 100,000 women in the UK every year. It is rightly called 'the silent epidemic'. Symptoms include;

- Panic attacks and anxiety
- Feeling ill and having physical symptoms that are unusual for you such as chest pains, breathing problems, headaches, dizziness, many minor illnesses and stomach upsets. You may often feel confused and/or have 'foggy' vision

- Worrying constantly about the health of yourself, your baby, other children or family and friends
- Obsessive thoughts, repetitive chanting or hearing voices
- Having worries that everyday objects such as knives, stairs, play equipment or even your car are dangerous and could harm your child, yourself or your family
- Having 'what if' thoughts and the consequences
- Feeling that you are a 'bad' mother or a 'bad' person

Don't try to cope alone, talk about your feelings and accept any offers of help. Remember PNI is an illness and mothers who suffer from it WILL recover.

It is highly likely that a certain proportion of female staff within the police service will suffer from PNI. They should be appropriately supported and treated with sensitivity.

More here on [NHS Choices](#) or [the Association for Post Natal Illness](#) or [PNI.org.uk](#)

Pregnancy and maternity

'New and expectant mothers' is a term used for women who are pregnant, have given birth in the last 6 months or are breast feeding. They face increased health and safety risks in the workplace, such as exposure to chemicals and other harmful agents, and physical hazards, such as manual handling.

Pregnancy should not be treated as an illness. However, normal working conditions may not be suitable during pregnancy and whilst breast feeding.

The UK's Health and Safety Executive has some helpful advice for employers on a providing a safe and healthy working environment, which includes a leaflet, [New and expectant mothers who work](#), and [webpages](#) devoted to the topic.



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Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

TSS is a rare but potentially fatal illness. Anyone can get TSS, but for reasons that are still not understood, a significant proportion of cases occur in women who are on their period and using tampons. It is caused where normally harmless bacteria, commonly found in the nose, armpit, groin or vagina suddenly produce toxins. Symptoms include sudden high temperature, vomiting, rapid pulse, fluid loss, sore throat, aching muscles, skin rash, dizziness, headaches and confusion.

If you develop a sudden fever and one or more of the other symptoms listed above, it is still extremely unlikely that you have TSS. Nevertheless, symptoms like these should never be ignored. Contact your GP, local out-of-hours service or NHS Direct (on 111) immediately. If you are wearing a tampon, remove it straight away.

Women under 30 are 3 times more at risk than older women. Women who have suffered from a mild form have a high risk of contracting it again if they continue to use tampons.

More on symptoms, causes and treatment on [NHS choices](#)

Men's Health

On average, men go to their GP half as often as women. It's important to be aware of changes to your health, and to see your GP immediately if you notice something that's not right.

For health information specific to men, [aged 18 - 39, see NHS Choices](#) and [aged 40 - 60, also on NHS Choices](#).

Important information on [five health symptoms men should never ignore](#).

Enlarged prostate

When the prostate is enlarged, it can press on the tube that carries urine from the bladder. This can make it hard to pass urine, which can be a sign of prostate disease, including cancer.

[Prostate cancer](#) is the most common cancer in men in the UK. More than 40,000 men are diagnosed with it every year. Other symptoms of prostate disease include:

- Needing to urinate more frequently, especially in the middle of the night
- Needing to rush to urinate
- Difficulty in starting
- Straining and taking a long time whilst urinating
- Weak flow
- A feeling that the bladder has not emptied
- Pain or burning when you pass urine

If you have any of these symptoms, see your GP. [Symptoms and sources of support](#).

Impotence

Most men have problems getting or keeping an erection (impotence) at some point. See your GP if your erection problems last for several weeks.

Generally, lifestyle changes, such as losing weight and exercise, can correct the problem. Some men may need medication such as sildenafil (also known as Viagra).

Your GP is likely to assess your general health because impotence, also known as erectile dysfunction, can be a sign of more serious conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure.

For more information on causes, diagnosis and treatment, see the [NHS choices webpage](#)

Male Midlife Crisis

The male midlife crisis is often made fun of, but for many it is a distressing experience.

A male midlife crisis can happen when men think they've reached life's halfway stage. Anxieties over what they've accomplished so far, either in their job or personal life, can cause a period of [depression](#). In men, this usually happens between the ages of 35 and 50.

Health experts think this may be related to the brain or hormonal changes.

Further information on the [male midlife crisis and where to go to for support](#).

Testicular cancer

[Testicular cancer](#) is the most common cancer in men aged 20 to 35. Nearly 2,000 men are diagnosed with testicular cancer each year in the UK, and regular self-examination is recommended.

If you notice a lump or abnormality in your testicles, first see your GP.

Most testicular lumps are not cancer, but it is essential to have any abnormalities checked. This is because treatment for testicular cancer is much more effective if the cancer is diagnosed early.

Further information on [testicular lumps and swellings](#).



Health

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Useful health tips

Five choices to help you stay healthy

Similarly, Patient.co.uk recommend [five major lifestyle choices](#) that mean you will be less likely to develop heart disease, stroke, diabetes, liver problems, lung problems, and certain cancers:

- Don't smoke
- Take regular exercise
- Eat a healthy diet
- Try to lose weight if you're overweight
- Don't drink too much alcohol

Ten ways to boost your health

According to the NHS, there are no big secrets to good health - they have a [list of ten things that you can do today to improve your health](#):

1. Check your weight
2. Drink less
3. Reduce your salt and fat intake
4. Exercise regularly
5. Eat more fruit and vegetables
6. Manage your stress levels
7. Improve your sleep
8. Quit smoking
9. Check your sexual health
10. Check that lump

Weight loss

Having a large amount of fat on the stomach (compared to on the thighs or bottom) has been linked to a higher chance of developing diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. However, it's important to address weight loss sensibly.

Try the NHS' [weight loss guide](#) and [weight loss tips](#), and see a GP in cases of substantial weight loss.



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Additional sources of support

Police Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres

There are several services that focus specifically on the health and wellbeing of serving and retired police officers.

The Police Treatment Centres operates two treatment centres at St Andrews, near Harrogate, North Yorkshire, and Castlebrae in Auchterarder, Perthshire, while the Police Rehabilitation Centre is located at Flint House in Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

The centres provide a space where serving and retired police officers can receive treatment, rest, recuperation and support following an illness or injury sustained on or off-duty, with many services and treatments tailored specifically to police officers' needs.

Check the [Police Treatment Centres' website](#) (for details on their Yorkshire and Perthshire centres)

or

the [Police Rehabilitation Centre's website](#) (Oxfordshire) for more information.



Government information

The government's strategy paper, [Health, work and well-being - Caring for our future](#), is clearly focused on strategies for preventing ill health and supporting those with health problems.

Best practice for managers

Cancer

Check to see if there is a policy on cancer screening which may include paid time off for screening, follow-up appointments and necessary treatment

Provide staff with information on screening (This facility should be available to all women workers regardless of age and working hours)

Menopause

Raise awareness amongst managers about health implications which could affect work like sleep disturbance, hot flushes, poor concentration and memory

Increase sources of support and information

Improve working environments: toilet/shower facilities, workstation/seating support, improved ventilation etc.

Mental health

Check to see if your force has a stress policy

Be vigilant to colleagues who may have been involved in a traumatic event at work or who are experiencing stress in their personal lives

Monitor workloads

Raise any concerns with HR

Musculoskeletal health

Refer individuals to HR at an early stage for workplace and desk assessments

Safety representatives should ensure that risk assessments take in to account changes to workstations to improve working postures

Encourage assessments of manual handling tasks

Osteoporosis

Provide all staff with information and advice about osteoporosis

Involve Occupational Health Units in promoting awareness of this condition

Check to see if your force has a menopause policy which may include osteoporosis and the provision of paid time off for screening and treatment

Pre Menstrual Syndrome

Raise awareness of the risks in the workplace and improve facilities

Develop workplace guidelines

Nominate a designated person (preferably a woman) to give advice and support

Conduct a review of sickness and absence management procedures to monitor and suggest modifying the trigger levels for sickness absence procedures to take account of PMS.

Pregnancy and maternity

Provide training in how work may be altered to accommodate changes in posture and physical capability, including taking breaks during pregnancy

Consider job rotation, relocation or suspension on full pay

Liaise with the woman's own GP to ensure capability

Risk-assess the situation after a return to work from maternity leave

The PFEW guide to family leave and flexible working contains risk assessment templates which can be utilised by forces to carry out continuous risk assessments.

1 Source: *Making it possible: improving mental health and well-being in England*.

Web links to further information

There are web links throughout the document that takes you to more information. If you have a printed version, please find below web sites referred to in each section.

Common problems for men and women

Alcohol

www.rcpsych.ac.uk
www.nhs.uk

Blood pressure

www.nhs.uk

Cancer

www.nhs.uk
www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Cardiovascular disease

www.nhs.uk
www.patient.co.uk
www.ovarian.org.uk
www.cancerresearchuk.org

Osteoporosis

www.nos.org.uk

Mental health

www.nhs.uk
www.mentalhealth.org.uk
www.mind.org.uk
www.depressionalliance.org

Moles

www.nhs.uk

Musculoskeletal health

www.nhs.uk

Obesity

www.nhs.uk

Smoking

www.nhs.uk

Women's health

IVF

www.nhs.uk
www.hfea.gov.uk

Menopause

www.nhs.uk
www.bawp.org

Menstruation

www.nhs.uk

Post natal illness

www.nhs.uk
www.apni.org
www.pni.org.uk

Pregnancy and maternity

www.hse.gov.uk

Men's health

www.nhs.uk

Impotence

www.nhs.uk

Male midlife crisis

www.nhs.uk

Five choices to help you stay healthy

www.patient.co.uk

Ten ways to boost your health

www.nhs.uk

Weight loss

www.nhs.uk

Additional sources of support

www.thepolicetreatmentcentres.org
www.flinthouse.co.uk

Government paper on 'health work and well-being - caring for our future' www.gov.uk

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