

**Southwark Council**

**Free Healthy Nursery Meals**

**Programme guide**

**September 2021**

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## Introduction

In July 2019, Southwark Council introduced Free Healthy Nursery Meals (FHNM) for school nursery classes and maintained nursery schools, as an extension of the Free Healthy School Meals (FHSM) programme.

Evidence shows that the best time for setting healthy behaviours, in order to prevent children becoming overweight or obese as adults, or developing poor eating habits, is during the early years<sup>1</sup>. It is important to set healthy eating habits at a young age, so that these behaviours can continue into primary school and onwards. FHNM can also help to address food insecurity and reduce childcare costs for parents and carers.

A report by Public Health England has found that obesity-related conditions worsen the effect of COVID-19<sup>2</sup>, whilst lockdown restrictions have increased food insecurity in the borough four-fold. Delivering programmes that address nutritional inequalities, such as the FHNM programme, are now more important than ever.

This guide<sup>3</sup> provides an overview of the five key components of FHNM:

1. Eating environments and positive meal times
2. A healthy balanced plate, including portion size
3. Sugar reduction
4. Water and milk only
5. Packed lunches

## Funding

FHNM is funded at £1.40 per meal. The number of meals per child is calculated based on their funded hours:

- If a child is eligible for 30 hours of funding, the school will be allocated to £7.00 a week (equivalent of 5 meals per week)
- If a child is eligible for 15 hours of funding, the school will be allocated to £4.20 a week (equivalent of 3 meals per week)

As with the Free Healthy School Meals programme, a 91% attendance rule is applied to the funding. This is based on average sickness, absences and those who choose to opt out. Two payments will be made per financial year; one in the summer term and one in the autumn term, and will be based on the most recent January census.

It is the responsibility of each school to decide how this funding is used for lunches, breakfasts or to provide healthy snacks throughout day. This is to best suit the needs of children, attendance patterns and onsite facilities.

Ideally, the funding is to be used for healthy lunches or healthy breakfasts. Should a child not be able to attend for either, the funding can be used to provide a healthy mid morning, or mid afternoon snack-meal.

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<sup>1</sup> [Nutrition Matters for the Early Years report](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PHE report: Excess weight and COVID-19](#)

<sup>3</sup> This guide includes information from a number of national guidance documents with contributions from Evelina London's Community Children's Nutrition and Dietetics and recommendations from Cookwise, an independent organisation that have been reviewing school food provision across the borough.

## 1. Eating environments and positive meal times

A positive eating environment plays an important role in promoting healthy eating habits and successful meal times.

Creating the right environment should be a collaboration with children, staff and parents to ensure everyone has a say in making mealtimes a positive experience.

Top tips for creating positive eating environments for young children:

- Provide family style eating, set clear routines with hand washing and encourage children to set the table
- Use size appropriate plates, cutlery and cups
- Encourage positive role modelling, with adults and children eating together
- Display age appropriate healthy eating resources

### Positive meal times

Learning to eat a wide range of food is a gradual process for many young children, and some may need to be exposed to a new food up to 10 to 15 times before readily accepting it<sup>4</sup>. Food refusal is a normal part of child development and will often peak at around 2 years of age<sup>5</sup>.

Early years settings play a very important role in helping children to explore new foods during mealtimes and in the learning environment.

A number of factors can affect a child's mealtime behaviour, including:

- Negative feeding experiences during infancy and early childhood
- Previously experiencing medical problems associated with feeding such as reflux or allergies
- Chronic physical issues such as iron deficiency anaemia, constipation or dental problems.

Top tips for creating a positive mealtime<sup>6</sup>:

- Avoid pressurising a child to eat, it is always better for a child to eat because they want to
- Avoid using food as a reward, as it makes some foods seem more desirable than others

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<sup>4</sup> Eat Better, Start Better guide

<sup>5</sup> You should seek support if a child has poor growth, low body weight, is eating less than ten foods and is not thriving. You can signpost to a Health Visitor or GP who will consider if a referral for a nutritional assessment is needed

<sup>6</sup> Eat Better, Start Better guide

## 2. A healthy balanced plate

For young children, a healthy balanced diet should include:

- **Starchy food:** 4 portions per day
- **Fruit and vegetables:** 5 portions per day
- **Dairy and alternatives:** 3 portions per day
- **Protein:** 2-3 portions per day

### Portion sizes

Young children have relatively high-energy requirements for their size and have only small stomachs.

To make sure young children get the energy and nutrients they need throughout the day it is important that they eat little and often (three snack times throughout the day is recommended by First Steps Nutrition<sup>7</sup>). Good communication with carers and parents is therefore important to help you work in partnership to make sure the needs of the children are met.

Be mindful that the appetites of children during the early years can be very variable so there is no 'perfect' portion size. [First Steps Nutrition](#) have produced a guide for portion sizes for young children.

### Breakfast

Breakfast is an important meal of the day, whether it is eaten at home or at nursery.

A healthy breakfast should include:

- One portion of starchy carbohydrate e.g. breakfast cereals or bread
- A portion of fruit or vegetables
- A portion of dairy or dairy alternative e.g. milk with cereal or a low sugar yogurt

Sugar-coated and chocolate-flavoured cereals should be avoided. The [British Nutrition Foundation](#) have produced a guide to explain food labels, including for cereals.



*Example of a wide-range of balanced breakfast items: Cookwise*

More helpful information and examples of breakfast plans can be found in the [Eat Better Start Better guide](#).

It is important to note that the [School Food Standards](#) apply to maintained nurseries. There are lots of [resources available](#) online, including a School Food Standards checklist for Headteachers.

<sup>7</sup> First Steps Nutrition, [Eating well: Snacks for 1-4years](#)

## Lunch

A two-course lunch should comply with the following guidelines and the Southwark Council dessert policy (Appendix 1). If the main school lunches meet these guidelines then a good option would be to serve smaller portions in the nursery class.

### Main course guidelines

Over a week's menu there should be:

- Three different starchy foods, preferably wholegrain varieties
- At least one portion of fruit or vegetables with every meal, with a variety across the week
- A portion of protein each day. This could be beans, pulses, fish, eggs or meat (red meat or poultry) to provide a variety across the week
- A meat free day once a week, using alternatives such as pulses or beans
- One portion of sustainable oily fish (salmon, sardines, pilchards) at least once every 3 weeks
- Limit fried starchy foods to a maximum of once a week

[Public Health England](#) have a range of example menus for early years settings that meet the above guidance.

### Top tips for a sustainable menu

- Have fewer meat dishes
- Avoid processed food
- Base meals and snacks on locally sourced foods
- Reduce the use of dairy products
- Use sustainable fish
- Use seasonal produce
- Include more pulses, beans and lentils
- Aim for snacks to be fruit and vegetable based

[Sustain](#) have lots of information to help with making sustainable food choices

[First Steps Nutrition](#) have produced a detailed guide on healthy and sustainable diets in early years

## Snacks

- Balance the most commonly served snack of fruit by serving raw vegetables several times a week
- To make fruit and vegetable snacks appealing and easy to eat cut them up and present in a way so that children can make positive choices



*Snacks presented in an appealing, easy to eat way: Cookwise*

### 3. Sugar reduction

Starchy foods, such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and yam are the best sources of energy for young children, as they contain other important nutrients.

Children do not need sugary foods such as sweets, biscuits, cakes or fizzy drinks for energy.

More helpful information and examples can be found in the [Eat Better Start Better](#) guide.

Southwark Council's dessert policy (Appendix 1) and water-only schools policy (Appendix 2) further support the reduction of sugar.

#### **Top tips for reducing sugar consumption:**

##### **Choose:**

- Fruit canned in juice rather than added sugar or syrup
- Yogurt or fromage frais that are low in sugar (e.g. Greek yogurt, plain natural yogurt).

##### **Offer:**

- Dried fruit at meal times only as chewing it releases sugar which can stick to children's teeth and cause tooth decay. Serving dried fruit with other foods helps to reduce the risks. A choice of milk or water during the day.

##### **Try:**

- Celebrating birthdays with fun activities or games or by encouraging parents to choose a book instead of bringing in sweet treats.

#### 4. Milk or water only options

It is a welfare requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage that fresh drinking water is available and accessible for all children throughout the day. Children should be able to help themselves to water where possible<sup>8</sup>.

Children should be prompted frequently to drink water as this is often not a consideration for busy learners.

##### **The benefits of choosing water or milk**

- Tap water is free at source and by using reusable bottles you can help reduce the amount of single-use plastics
- It is better for children's teeth and helping to maintain a healthy weight. Sugary drinks can contribute to many preventable health conditions.

Southwark's water-only schools policy was launched by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Find more information in our water-only schools policy (Appendix 2).



The Mayor of London's [water only toolkit](#) provides further information.

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<sup>8</sup> Eat Better, Start Better guide



## 5. Packed lunches

We hope that the Free Healthy Nursery Meals funding will help you reduce the number of packed lunches being eaten in the nursery class, by enabling you to provide healthy meals or snacks.

We recommend the use of a packed lunch policy for the nursery class to ensure that all children are receiving a healthy balanced meal, even when their parents choose to provide a packed lunch option.

First Steps Nutrition have developed a useful [packed lunches guide](#) for children aged 1-4 years old. This includes a number of budget friendly, healthy recipes that can be shared with parents.

### What should go into a packed lunch?

- One or two portions of starchy food, such as a sandwich or pasta. Wholegrains should be chosen where possible
- One portion of protein such as egg, chicken or hummus
- At least one portion of fruit
- At least one portion of vegetables
- One portion of dairy or dairy alternatives, e.g. low sugar yogurt, cheese or milk to drink.

Below are suggestions of healthy packed lunches from the First Steps Nutrition packed lunches guide.



Left: Egg roll, cucumber and tomato, and yoghurt and blueberries

Right: Rice and peas, jerk chicken, sweetcorn, tomatoes and mango.

A packed lunch policy template can be found [here](#).

## Useful resources

- [Public Health England guidance and example menus for early years settings](#): the recipes meet the Early Years Foundation Stage welfare requirement, in providing 'healthy, balanced and nutritious' meals for children
- [Eat Better, Start Better](#) voluntary food and drink guidelines for early years settings in England
- [First Steps Nutrition](#) provide great resources for early years settings on:
  - Portion sizes
  - Snacks
  - Packed lunches
  - Vegan diets
  - Cost effective recipes and getting the most out of Healthy Start vouchers
  - Sustainable menus
- [Evelina London Community Children's Nutrition and Dietetics Service](#) deliver the following sessions:
  - Starting Solid Foods (interactive talks for parents and babies)
  - Nutrition advice sessions (universal easy access to a dietitian)
  - Positive mealtimes (5 week programme for parent and child aged 2-4 years by referral only)
  - Cook and Eat Well courses for parents and carers of the under 5s in children's centres. Practical cooking and nutrition education.
  - Cook & Taste sessions for parent and child to experience food preparation and cooking together in children's centres.
- The [Food Standards Agency](#) provides clear guidance for schools on managing allergies, as well as child friendly posters that can be displayed.
- [Healthy Start vouchers](#) can be used to buy healthy foods. The vouchers are for anyone who is pregnant or caring for children under 4 years and on a low income. Healthy Start vouchers can be exchanged for plain cows' milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula.

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## Appendix 1: Nursery dessert policy (October 2019)

### Context

At a population level too much sugar is being consumed, particularly amongst children. High levels of sugar intake increase the risk of tooth decay, with approximately one in six 5-year olds affected in Southwark<sup>9</sup>. This is a significant cost to the NHS and families<sup>10</sup>.

A high sugar intake is linked to excessive energy intake, which may increase the risk of overweight and obesity<sup>11</sup>. 1 in 4 children in Southwark are already overweight or obese by the time they start school in Reception Year<sup>12</sup>.

Data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that ‘sugar, preserves and confectionery’ contribute the most sugar to children’s diets<sup>13</sup>. However, desserts containing a higher proportion of fruit, milk and cereals (such as rice or oats) can be included as part of a healthy, balanced diet for young children and can contain essential nutrients such as calcium and iron<sup>14</sup>.

### Policy Introduction

Current school food standards for primary and secondary school lunches in England state that all fruit-based desserts should have a content of at least 50% fruit measured by weight of the raw ingredients (e.g. fruit crumble, fruit pie, fruit sponge, fruit cobbler, fruit jelly). Furthermore, no confectionery, chocolate or chocolate coated products are permitted throughout the whole school day<sup>15</sup>.

There are no mandatory food or nutrient standards for pre-schools and nurseries in England, however best practice voluntary guidelines for Early Years settings in England have been produced in the form of “Eat Better Start Better” which is held by Action for Children<sup>11</sup>. Public Health England has also produced guidance advising a variety of desserts is provided each week but with a limited provision of cakes and biscuits<sup>16</sup>.

This policy is informed by best practice guidance and aims to reduce the amount of free sugar served at lunchtimes. The policy meets the government dietary recommendations for children and current school food standards (see Appendix 1 for further details).

Within this policy, free sugars are defined as “sugars added to food or drinks, and sugars found naturally in honey, syrups, and unsweetened fruit and vegetable juices, smoothies and purées”<sup>17</sup>.

### The Southwark nursery dessert policy

This policy is applicable to all maintained nurseries and nursery classes within primary schools in Southwark, participating in the Council’s Free Healthy Nursery Meals (FHNM) programme.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/7301/JSNA-2018-Oral-Health-CYP-20180718.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-achieving-the-20>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-achieving-the-20>

<sup>12</sup> National Child Measurement Programme 2017-18

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-7-and-8-combined>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Eat-Better-Start-Better1.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.schoolfoodplan.com/actions/school-food-standards/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/example-menus-for-early-years-settings-in-england>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/resources-and-publications/information-guides/eat-better-start-better-pack/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/>

Nursery lunches (main course and second course) should complement each other to ensure balance and variety, and to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements.

Nursery lunches are required to meet all of the following criteria:

- Each lunch to include a main course and a second course. A second course can be either a 'starter' or a 'dessert'.
- Only one second course dish to be made available at lunch (with the exception of a food allergen alternative option).
- Second courses served over a week to include:
  - **Three times a week** - fruit (such as seasonal fruit salad) with a dairy-based accompaniment such as natural yoghurt with no added sugar.
  - **Once a week** – low salt savoury crackers or breadsticks served with fruit or vegetables and a dairy item such as cheese.
  - **Once a week** – fruit based pudding or cake, containing minimal free sugars and a content of at least 50% fruit or vegetables when measured by weight of the raw ingredients (e.g. fruit crumble, fruit pie, fruit sponge, fruit cobbler).
- Dairy options with fruit could include natural or Greek yoghurt with no added sugar, or low sugar varieties of fromage frais, custard, rice pudding or semolina.
- No confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products to be served.

In addition to the policy requirements above, the second course of nursery lunches should also meet the following:

- Canned fruit should be canned in juice and not syrup.
- Whole milk yoghurt and cheese should be used.
- Use fresh or dried fruit to sweeten dishes instead of sugar/alongside reduced sugar.
- If providing ice cream, choose dairy ice cream as it contains more calcium than non-dairy ice cream, and limit to once a week with fruit-based desserts at meal times.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners when choosing or preparing desserts, puddings and cakes.
- Vary the desserts you offer with lunch each week.
- Ensure age appropriate portion sizes (see Appendix B for links to portion size guidance).

### **Policy implementation**

This policy will come into effect for all applicable nurseries and nursery classes from the start of the spring term (January 2020).

### **Appendix A - Government guidelines and recommendations for free sugars**

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) guidelines recommends that the average population intake of free sugars should not exceed 5% of total dietary energy for age groups from 2 years upwards. No specific recommendations are made for children aged under 2 years, due to the absence of information, but reducing or removing the amount of free sugars in the diet is encouraged<sup>18</sup>. This equates to a maximum free sugar intake of 15g for males and 13g for females, aged 2-3 years<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-carbohydrates-and-health-report>

<sup>19</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/618167/government\\_dietary\\_recommendations.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618167/government_dietary_recommendations.pdf)

## Appendix B – Recipe and portion size guidance

Example menus for early years settings in England, Part 2: Recipes (HM Government)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/example-menus-for-early-years-settings-in-england>

Eat better, start better – a practical guide (Action for Children) – Page 25

<https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Eat-Better-Start-Better1.pdf>

The table below has been extracted from the “Eat Better, Start Better” practical guide and demonstrates dessert menu suggestions and typical portion sizes in practice. Portion sizes are typical example portion sizes for children aged one to four years, and are not suitable for children under one year old.

Type of dessert	Typical portion sizes (as served; cooked) <sup>††</sup>	Typical portion sizes in practice, images not to scale
<b>Hot fruit-based desserts</b>	Apple and rhubarb crumble (60g) with custard (60g)  Crunchy summer crumble (60g) and yoghurt (60g)	
<b>Cakes or biscuits containing fruit</b>	Blueberry muffin (35-40g) Banana and raisin flapjack (35-40g)	
<b>Cold desserts</b>	Seasonal fruit salad (40g) Winter fruit salad (40g) with vanilla sauce (60g)	

## Appendix 2: Water only schools policy (February 2020)

### Context

Schools are a key setting to teach children about nutrition and healthy beverage choices. School based interventions reach all children regardless of their background. 51% of parents say their children drink more water and 47% say their children are eating more fruits and vegetables as a result of healthy school activities<sup>20</sup>.

Southwark has amongst the highest childhood excess weight and obesity levels in London, with 12.3% of reception age children and 25.8% of year 6 children measured as obese<sup>21</sup>.

One reason for this is the high sugar diet that many children consume. For example, a can of Coca-Cola contains 35g of sugar and a can of Pepsi contains 36g of sugar which equates to 150% of the recommended daily sugar intake for children aged between 7 and 10 years<sup>22</sup>. Fruit juices and smoothies also contain high levels of sugar despite often being advertised as healthy<sup>23</sup>.

High levels of sugar can also contribute to tooth decay. Approximately one in six 5-year olds have tooth decay in Southwark<sup>24</sup>. Every day in the UK there are 180 operations to remove children's teeth due to tooth decay, at a significant cost to the NHS and to families<sup>25</sup>.

Some soft drinks, particularly sports and energy drinks, have high levels of caffeine. Such drinks can cause poor concentration in class, headaches, irritability, sleepiness, dizziness and can affect behaviour and attainment<sup>26</sup>.

Schools are required to take action to improve children's health. Promoting drinking water and banning fizzy drinks will reduce tooth decay, promote healthier choices and improve the health of pupils. On average, children should be provided with 6-8 glasses of water per day.

### Policy introduction

Many schools in the UK have already adopted a water only policy to decrease the amount of sugar children are consuming, whilst increasing their hydration.

A water only school is one where the only drink available to students is water (and milk in nursery classes). Schools should ensure that children are not bringing sugary drinks onto the school premises, including for after school or with their lunch.

### Southwark's water only schools policy

1. The only drinks to be available to primary school and nursery class children are:
  - Plain water (unless for medical reasons)

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<sup>20</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/726114/Obesity\\_healthy\\_eating\\_and\\_physical\\_activity\\_in\\_primary\\_schools\\_170718.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726114/Obesity_healthy_eating_and_physical_activity_in_primary_schools_170718.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/child-health-profiles/data#page/1/gid/1938133228/pat/6/par/E12000007/ati/102/are/E09000028>

<sup>22</sup> <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/3/e010330>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/public-health/for-the-public/fizz-free-february?chapter=4>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/7301/JSNA-2018-Oral-Health-CYP-20180718.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.bda.org/news-centre/blog/counting-the-cost-of-tooth-extractions>

<sup>26</sup> <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/child-caffeine.html>

- Plain reduced fat milk in nursery classes (including skimmed or semi skimmed, lactose free and soya milk).
- 2. If a child has a medical condition that requires them to drink sugary drinks then this is treated as an exception to this policy and should be approved by the headteacher.
- 3. Other drinks should not be made available from school canteens. Schools should request that caterers and in house teams follow this policy, removing drinks other than water from their canteens. Drinking water provided must be free from water fountains and jugs on tables and not for sale in plastic bottles.
- 4. Pupils must have free access to drinking water throughout the day and be encouraged to drink it (see Appendix A for recommendations).
- 5. The water-only policy is to be applied to all breakfast and afterschool clubs, as well as extra curricular events such as sports days and school fetes.
- 6. Teachers should be water-only role models and regularly drink water in front of their students to highlight the importance of hydration. Staff must not be seen to be drinking sugary or fizzy drinks by children and should limit other drinks to the staff room only.
- 7. Parents are discouraged from bringing drinks other than water to the playground before and after school. Families are banned from packing drinks in lunch boxes as water is provided at school.
- 8. Banners and posters around the school should promote water consumption (Appendix B). Schools can further promote healthy drink choices by participating in the annual [Fizz Free February campaign](#).

This policy meets the voluntary food and drink guidelines for Early Years settings in England. More information about these guidelines can be found in the '[Eat Better Start Better](#)' guide.

### **Policy implementation**

This policy will be mandatory for all primary schools in Southwark (and nursery classes) from the start of the summer term, April 2020.

A water-only schools policy will be implemented alongside the Southwark dessert policy.

### **Water only schools policy's Appendix A: Recommendations and good practice**

In 2019 Southwark Council commissioned Cookwise, nutritionists with experience in school catering, to undertake a study of school meals within a sample of Southwark primary schools. Cookwise found that in nearly all schools, water was freely available from dining room tables from either jugs or pre-poured drinking beakers.

In schools where water was pre-poured into beakers, children were seen to drink more water, whilst in schools where children had to collect a cup from another table, they often did not and so went without a drink over lunchtime.



Water jugs are often too heavy for younger children resulting in spillages. Cookwise recommends that for younger children, water should be pre-poured into beakers and topped up for them regularly to avoid spillages.

For older children, water should be positioned in a visible location e.g. on dining tables so it is more difficult for children to avoid or miss.

All children should be actively encouraged to drink water during their lunch break by dining room staff, teachers and midday meal supervisors.

### **Water only schools policy's Appendix B: Change4Life**

Examples of water-only posters that could be put up in schools to promote drinking water:



More resources are available online: <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/>

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