

Cereality Check

What matters in the cereal aisle

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

Cereals are under siege. They're competing with greek yogurt, breakfast bars, breakfast shakes,

and smoothies in the supermarket (not to mention toast, bagels, and last night's leftovers at home). And they're up against oatmeal, yogurt parfaits, breakfast sandwiches, and pastries at Starbucks, McDonald's, and convenience stores.

Maybe that's why a cereal box will say almost anything—whether it's about whole grains, protein, fiber, weight loss, cholesterol, blood pressure, or energy—to get your attention. Here's what matters.

The information for this article was compiled by Lindsay Moyer.

Go for whole grains. Look for "100% Whole Grain" on the package. Don't rely on claims like "made with whole grain" or "whole grain first ingredient."

Exception: bran isn't a whole grain, yet the bran (outer layer) of the grain is the part that's richest in the intact, unprocessed fiber that may lower your risk of heart disease and diabetes. That's why we counted bran as a whole grain for our Best Bites.

We also gave Best Bites to cereals if the first two grain ingredients were whole grains or bran. (And we didn't penalize cereals if they had just a little refined grain.)

2 Check the calories in your serving. When you scan the Nutrition Facts label for calories, always check the serving size. With cereal, a serving could be anywhere from ¼ cup to 1¼ cups. That's because lighter cereals use a 1 oz. (30-gram) serving, while heavier cereals use 2 oz. (55 grams).

Most lighter cereals range from 100 calories per cup (think Cheerios or corn flakes) to about 150 calories (Honey Nut Cheerios or Special K Protein). Most heavier cereals (like raisin bran or shredded wheat) hover around 200 calories.

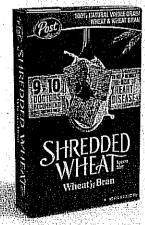
But watch out: granolas, mueslis, and some other heavy cereals like Post Grape-Nuts can hit 350 to 600 calories per cup. Granted, you may eat less than that, but how much less? Check for yourself.

To make matters worse, some brands—like Bear Naked and Nature's Path Organic—cheat by using a 1 oz. (¼-cup) serving

on granolas that come in a resealable bag. Their excuse: 1 oz. is the serving for a snack. How convenient. We doubled their servings to a half cup in our chart.

3 Get good fiber. Our Best Bites have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving (lighter cereals) or at least 6 grams (heavier cereals).

The catch: the evidence that fiber helps prevent heart disease and diabetes comes from studies of people who ate unprocessed, intact fiber—the kind in whole grains and bran. But these days, many cereals are pumped up with *processed* fibers like inulin (chicory root fiber) or oat, oat hull, soluble corn, or soluble wheat fiber, which have been purified into powders or syrups.



The bran is the fiber-rich part of the wheat kernel. That's why we consider it a "whole" grain.

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It's not clear how good those are at preventing constipation, lowering cholesterol, or anything else. Exception: the psyllium in Kellogg's All-Bran Buds does both.

Unfortunately, you can't tell from the ingredients or Nutrition Facts how much of each kind of fiber a cereal contains. So we denied Best Bites to cereals that listed processed fiber ahead of bran in the ingredients list (or that contained processed fiber but no added bran), even if they met our fiber minimum.

4 Minimize added sugars. It's not just kids' cereals. Adult cereals like Kashi GoLean Crunch have 3 teaspoons of added sugars per (1-cup) serving. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugars a day for women and 9 teaspoons for men.

Our Best Bites don't limit added sugars. Why? Because the Food and Drug Administration doesn't require Nutrition Facts labels to separate the naturally occurring sugar in fruit (like raisins) from added sugars like evaporated cane juice, brown rice syrup, honey, fruit juice concentrate, agave nectar, and high-fructose corn syrup.

(Note: We withheld Best Bites from cereals—like General Mills Fiber One Honey Clusters—that contain the sugar substitutes monk fruit extract or sucralose, which we rate as "Caution," or that have acesulfame-potassium, which we rate as "Avoid." See chemicalcuisine.org.)

Instead, add your own fruit to a cereal that has little or no added sugars, like bran flakes, shredded wheat, Cheerios, or Uncle Sam Original. Best Bites that do that for you include Bob's Red Mill Old Country Style Muesli, Alpen No Sugar Added, and Erewhon Organic or Uncle Sam Skinner's Raisin Bran.

5 Skip the coconut oil. A half cup of granola made with coconut or coconut oil can hit 5 to 10 grams of saturated fat. That's a quarter to half a day's worth. Our Best Bites have less than 3 grams of sat fat per serving.



Gets about half its "10g

PITCHING PROTEIN

"9g Protein. Stay Full Longer!" says the Kashi GoLean Crunch box.

"Helps support a healthy metabolism," crow the Post Great Grains Protein boxes. "Because protein takes longer-to-breakdown than fat and carbohydrate, the body uses more energy to digest protein and this helps you burn more calories."

"10g of Protein per serving helps fuel protein" from your milk. your body with sustained energy," says Post Honey Bunches of Oats Protein

Granola with Dark Chocolate.

Ignore those claims. They don't need to be backed by good evidence, and there isn't much evidence that higher-protein diets help fill you up, slim you down, or give you more energy (see cover story). It's a protein free-for-all out there.

However, getting more protein may help prevent muscle loss in middle-aged and older people. So a cereal that hits 10 to 13 grams of protein per serving may appeal to you more than one that has the usual 2 to 6 grams. Just make sure your protein isn't coming at a steep calorie cost. Look for at least 8 grams of protein for every 100 calories of cereal (like regular Kashi GoLean has).

And beware of tricks. Fiber One Protein, Cheerios Protein, Post Grape-Nuts Fit Cranberry Vanilla, Quaker Oatmeal Squares, and others make claims like "10g protein with milk." Why include the 4 grams of protein in a half cup of milk? Marketing.

Want more protein? Top a half cup of plain greek yogurt (10 grams) with your cereal. Voilà! A cereal & yogurt parfait.



"Morning energy" just means 220 calories a cup.

ENERGY SCAM

"Helps get you going & keeps you going," promises Post Honey Bunches of Oats Morning Energy Cinnamon Crunch. "Don't skip breakfast! Your body needs Morning Energy! Fuel your body with a breakfast that provides whole grain, fiber & protein for energy that lasts."

Did someone say "energy"? On food labels, the word "en-

ergy" just means calories. All the rest is fluff.

"B-Vitamins help to shuttle the energy from the foods you eat into your body's cells," says Kellogg's Crispix. "Think of them as partners in energy metabolism." Trust us. If you're feeling tired, it's not because you're short on B vitamins.

The bottom line: Ignore "energy" claims. Instead, look for one of our Best Bites. Whether or not their fiberrich whole grains keep you from getting hungry (and tired) mid-morning, they're better for you.

HAVE A HEART?



it has a heart claim because (like most cereals)

Heart claims—explicit or implied—are all over cereal boxes. You may be surprised to find out why:

■ Whole grain. A cereal (like General Mills Oatmeal Crisp) that's at least 51 percent whole grain can make a claim that's not just about a healthy heart but about heart disease. (The claim: "Diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods, and low it's low in saturated fat. in saturated fat and cholesterol, may help reduce the risk of heart disease.")

■ Soluble fiber. "Can help lower cholesterol as part of a heart healthy diet," says the yellow Cheerios box. "Three grams of soluble fiber daily from whole grain oat foods...may reduce the risk of heart disease. Cheerios cereal provides 1 gram per serving."

Kashi's Heart to Heart cereals make a similar claim. The catch for both: you'd have to eat three servings a day to lower your cholesterol by 3 percent.

- Low in saturated fat. Chocolate Cheerios are too low in oats to make a heart disease claim based on soluble fiber. No problem. Instead, General Mills makes a heart disease claim based on Chocolate Cheerios' low level of saturated fat. Of course, almost any cereal, even one that's half sugar, could make that claim. General Mills Basic 4 does it, too.
- Antioxidants. "3 Antioxidants," say the Kashi Heart to Heart boxes. "Antioxidant Vitamins A, C, & E, Including Beta-Carotene," says Kellogg's Smart Start Original Antioxidants—a "Heart Healthy Selection" cereal that isn't even all whole grain. In study after study, those antioxidants didn't prevent heart disease, and the companies know it.
- Omega-3. "250mg ALA From Flaxseed," boasts Kellogg's Raisin Bran Omega-3. Too bad the shorter-chain omega-3 ALA is less likely to lower your risk of heart disease than the longer-chain omega-3s EPA and DHA that are found in fish oil.

GLUTEN-FREE, NOT CALORIE-FREE

"Reinventing Granola," say Lärabar's Renola Grain Free Granolas, "Using a delicious blend of non-GMO nuts, fruits, and seeds, we left out the grain (gluten free!) and packed in the flavor."

And the calories. Renola crams 340 of them in just half a cup, thanks to its nuts, seeds, and dried fruit.

The first ingredient in many gluten-free cereals is whole-grain corn or brown rice. That's fine, but neither typically supplies enough fiber to hit our minimum for a



Cuts the grains (and gluten), not the calories.

Best Bite. Our only gluten-free Best Bites: Enjoy Life Crunchy Flax Original and four of the five Love Grown Oat Clusters Granolas.

All three cereals are proud of their 8 grams of whole grain. But 8 grams isn't much. It's just 27 percent of a lighter cereal, which has a 30-gram serving size, and just 15 percent of a heavier cereal, which has a 55-gram serving size.



Just 9 grams of whole grain because the first ingredient is refined rice.

(That's why it would help if labels revealed how much whole *and* how much refined grain cereals contained.)

But you need the ingredients list to know why a cereal is low in whole grains. Kashi GoLean (a Best Bite) has just 8 grams because it's high in soy, which isn't a whole grain (nor are other healthy ingredients like fruits, nuts, and bran). Jif and Fruitful O's have just 8 grams because they're high in sugar and refined corn meal.

So unless your cereal is 100% whole grain, get thee to the ingredients list. If the corn or wheat or whatever doesn't say "whole," assume it's refined. Some exceptions: brown rice, oats, graham flour, and sprouted grains are whole (or almost always whole), though the ingredients list may not say it.

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"Chocolatey" doesn't mean "chocolate."

IS IT REAL?

A few more tricks to watch out for:

■ Fruit & nuts. "Flavored with Real Banana and Natural Banana Flavor," says the box of Banana Nut Cheerios, which have more salt than real banana...and no nuts at all.

"Made with Real Fruit!" says Kashi Berry Blossoms, which has more acacia gum than dried berry powder.

■ Simply. "Natural" is out. "Simple" is in. (That way, companies can't get sued for using artificial ingredients.) But "simple" may be anything but.

Granola is traditionally made from oats, dried fruit, nuts, oil, and honey. Quaker's line of Simply Granola also has whey, inulin, nonfat dry milk, glycerin, whey protein concentrate, and natural flavor. "Simple" can be real...or simply spin.

■ Chocolatey. That's code for "not real chocolate." In Kellogg's Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory Chocolatey Almond, "chocolatey" means sugar, palm kernel oil, cocoa, emulsifiers, and artificial flavor. So much for "premium ingredients" from a "premier chocolatier."

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Cereal Numbers

Best Bites () have: 1) whole grains as the first two grains in the ingredients list OR little or no refined grains (we counted bran as whole grain), 2) at least 3 grams (light cereals) or 6 grams (heavier cereals) of fiber per serving (if a cereal contains processed fiber, bran has to appear above it in the ingredients list), 3) no accesulfame-potassium, sucralose, or monk fruit extract, and 4) less than 3 grams of saturated fat per serving. Within each category, cereals are ranked from most to least fiber, then least to most calories and sugar

o leas	t fiber, then least to most calories and sugar.	a,	. 6	3	'n.
	Lighter Cereals (about 1 oz. per serving)	Calories	Fiber 9	2 Potal Sug	Z Protein
	General Mills Fiber One Original (½ cup)	60	14 ^p	O ⁵	2
W	Nature's Path Organic Smart Bran (½ cup)	80	13 ^p	1.5	3
	Kellogg's All-Bran Buds (1/3 cup)	80	13 ^p	2	3
VV	Kellogg's All-Bran Original (½ cup)	80	10	1.5	4
•	Kashi Berry Blossoms (¾ cup)	100	6	1.5 ^s	2
VV	Kellogg's All-Bran Complete Wheat Flakes (¥ cup)	90	5	1	3
V	Post Bran Flakes (¾ cup)	100	5	1	3
11	365 Organic (Whole Foods) Bran Flakes (¾ cup)	110	5	0.5	3
v	Nature's Path Organic Heritage Bites (¼ cup)	110	5	0.5	3
V	Nature's Path Organic Flax Plus Multibran Flakes (¾ <i>cup</i>)	110	5	1	4
V	Nature's Path Organic Multigrain Oatbran (¥ cup)	110	5	1	3
W	Nature's Path Organic Heritage Flakes (¾ cup)	120	5	1	4
VV	365 Organic (Whole Foods) Whole Wheat Flakes (¾ cup)	100	4	1	4
VV	Weetabix Organic Crispy Flakes (¾ cup)	110	4	1	3
W	Kashi Heart to Heart Honey Toasted Oat (¥ cup)	120	4 ^r	1	4
V	Nature's Path Organic Flax Plus Cinnamon (¾ cup)	120	4	1	3
VV	Love Grown Power O's Original (1 cup)	130	4	0.5	6
VV	Weetabix (2 biscuits)	130	4	0.5	4
VV	Arrowhead Mills Organic Oat Bran Flakes (1 cup)	140	4	0.5	5
V	General Mills Cheerios (1 cup)	100	3	0	3
	General Mills Total (¾ cup)	100	3	ī	2 2
VV	General Mills Wheaties (¾ cup)	100	. 3	1	2
	Cascadian Farm Organic Fruitful O's (¾ cup)	100	3 ^r	2	2
V	365 Organic (Whole Foods) Wheat Waffles (¾ <i>cup</i>)	110	· 3	1 .	3
	Post Grape-Nuts Flakes (¾ cup)	110	3	1 ·	3
	Barbara's Toasted Oatmeal Flakes (¾ cup)	110	3	1.5	4
	Trader Joe's Toasted Oatmeal Flakes (¾ cup)	110	3	1.5	3
	Cascadian Farm Organic Honey Nut O's (1 cup)		3	1.5	2
VV	General Mills Multi Grain Cheerios (1 cup)	110	3	1.5	
	Kellogg's Special K Vanilla Almond (¾ cup)	110	3 ^p	2	2
	Cascadian Farm Organic Purely O's (1¼ cups)	120	. 3	0	3
	Arrowhead Mills Organic Spelt Flakes (1 cup)	120	3	0.5	4
	Nature's Path Organic Heritage O's (¼ cup)	120	3	0.5	4
	' Mother's Toasted Oat Bran (¾ cup) ' Nature's Path Organic Millet Rice (¾ cup)	120	3	1	4
		120			<u> </u>
././	Kellogg's Special K Protein (¾ cup) Love Grown Power O's—Chocolate, Honey,	120	3	1.55	10
	or Strawberry (1 cup)	120	3	2	4
	General Mills Banana Nut Cheerios (¾ cup)	100	2	2	1
	General Mills Chocolate Cheerios (¾ cup)	100	2	2	1
•	Kellogg's Jif (¾ cup)	100	2	2.5	2
	General Mills Honey Nut Cheerios (¾ cup)	110	2	2	2
	Post Honey Bunches of Oats Honey Roasted (4 cup)	- 120	2.	1.5	2
	Kellogg's Corn Flakes (1 cup)	100	1	0.5	2
	Kellogg's Crispix (1 cup)	110	1	0.5	2

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	Heavier Cereals (about 2 oz. per serving)	_்ச	120	<u>رة</u>	4
	Kashi Good Friends (1 cup)	160	12 ^p	2.5	5
	Weetabix Organic Crispy Flakes & Fiber (14 cups)	170	1 T ^p	2,5	6
VV	Barbara's High Fiber Medley (1 cup), average of all flavors	190	11 ^p	7	
V	Uncle Sam Supergrains Rye & Hemp (¾ cup)	230	11	2	<u>5</u> 8
	Kashi GoLean (1 cup)	160	10 ^p	2	13
	General Mills Fiber One Honey Clusters (1 cup)	170	10:	2 ⁵	
v	General Mills Fiber One Raisin Bran		1.2	<u> </u>	4
	Clusters (1 cup)	170	10	3,5	3
	Uncle Sam Original (¾ cup)	190	10	0	<u>7</u> .
VV	General Mills Fiber One Nutty Clusters & Almonds (1 cup)	190	10	3	4
V	Kashi GoLean Vanilla Graham Clusters (1 cup)	170	9°	: 2	11
V	365 (Whole Foods) High Fiber			<u> </u>	
	Morning O's (1 cup)	170	9 ^p	2	6
	Trader Joe's Organic High Fiber O's (1¼ cups)	180	9°	. 2	6
	Post Shredded Wheat Wheat'n Bran (114 cups)	200	9	0	6_
	Nature's Path Organic Optimum Slim Low Fat Vanilla (1 cup)	200	9 ^p	1.5	9
V	' Nature's Path Organic Optimum Power Blueberry Cinnamon Flax (¾ cup)	200	9 ^p	2	9
v	Cascadian Farm Organic Hearty	:		- 77	
	Morning Fiber (¼ cup)	170	8*	2	4
	Trader Joe's Raisin Bran (1 cup) Nature's Path Organic Flax Plus Raisin	170	8	4	4
1	Bran (¾ cup)	190	8	3	6
V	Post Raisin Bran (1 cup)	190	8	4.5	5
1.5	Kashi GoLean Crunch (1 cup)	200	8 ^p	3	9
	' Bob's Red Mill Old Country Style Muesli (1/2 cup)	220	8	2.5	8
VV	' Kellogg's Raisin Bran (1 cup)	190	7	4.5	5
	Engine 2 Plant-Strong (Whole Foods) Rip's	222		12E	·
	Big Bowl (½ cup), average of all flavors	210	7	0.5	<u></u>
	Kashi 7 Whole Grain Nuggets (½ cup)	210	7	0.5	7
	Post Grape-Nuts (% cup)	210	7	1	6_
	Post Great Grains Digestive—Berry Medley or Vanilla Graham (1 cup), average	210	7	2	6
00	' Nature's Path Organic Flax Plus Pumpkin Raisin Crunch (¾ cup)	210	7	3	6
V	Post Great Grains Protein—Cinnamon Hazel- nut or Honey, Oats & Seeds (1 cup), average	230	7	9	
v.	Post Great Grains Banana Nut Crunch (1 cup)	230	7	2.5	<u>8</u>
	Post (or other brands) Shredded Wheat	230		2.5	
	Original Big Biscuit (2 biscuits)	160	6	0	5
	General Mills Wheat Chex (¾ cup)	160	6	1	5
~	Post (or other brands) Shredded Wheat Spoon Size Original (1 cup)	170	6	0	6
V	Kashi 7 Whole Grain Flakes (7 cup)	170	6 ^p	1.5	6
	Erewhon Organic Raisin Bran (1 cup)	180	6	2	6
	Kashi Organic Promise—Autumn Wheat, Berry				1,
	Fruitful, or Island Vanilla (27-29 biscuits), avg.	180	6	2	6_
	Cascadian Farm Organic Raisin Bran (1 cup)	180	6 ^p	3	
	/ 365 Organic (Whole Foods) Raisin Bran (1 cup)	180	6	3.5	4
	Uncle Sam Skinner's Raisin Bran (1 cup) Kellogg's Frosted Mini-Wheats	190	6	2	<u>6</u>
	(21-25 biscuits), average of all flavors	190	6	2.5	_5
V.	/ Enjoy Life Crunchy Flax Original (gluten-free) (延 cup)	200	6	0.5	7
v	Kellogg's Frosted Mini-Wheats Little Bites— Chocolate or Original (1 cup), average	200	6	2,5	5
	Kellogg's Cracklin' Oat Bran (¾ cup) ^F	200		3.5	4
/	Alpen No Sugar Added (% cup)	210	6	2	7
	Quaker Toasted Oat Bran (1¼ cups)	210		2	7
	Alpen Dark Chocolate (¾ cup)	220	6	2	7
	Kind Healthy Grains Oats & Honey	~~U	<u> </u>		
	Clusters (gluten-free) (½ cup)	220	6 ^p	2	4

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Post Shredded Wheat Honey Nut (1 cup)	220	6	3	5
Nature's Path Organic Heritage Crunch (¾ cup)	230	6 ^p	1.5 .	6
Love Grown Oat Clusters Granola—Apple Walnut Delight, Raisin Almond Crunch, Simply Oats, or Sweet Cranberry Pecan				
(gluten-free) (½ cup), average	260	6	3	6.
Kellogg's Raisin Bran Omega-3 (1 cup)	180	5 ^p	4	4
Quaker Simply Granola (½ cup), average of all flavors	200	5 ^p	3	5
Quaker Oatmeal Squares (1 cup), any flavor	210	5.	2	6
Alpen Origiṇal (¾ cup)	210	5	2.5	7
Post Grape-Nuts Fit Cranberry Vanilla (44 cup)	220	5	2	6
Familia Swiss Müesli Original Recipe (1/2 cup)	220	5	3	6
Post Honey Bunches of Oats Morning Energy Cinnamon Crunch (1 cup)	220	5 ^p	3	6
General Mills Fiber One Protein Maple Brown Sugar (1 cup)	220	5 ^p	4	6
Bear Naked Fit V'nilla Almond Granola (½ cup)	240	5	2	8
General Mills Oatmeal Crisp—Crunchy Almond or Hearty Raisin (1 cup), average	240	5 .	3.5	6
Bear Naked Original Cinnamon Protein Granola (½ cup)	280	5	3	12
Back to Nature Classic Granola (½ cup)	200	4	2.5	6
General Mills Basic 4 (1 cup)	200	4	3	4
Familia Swiss Müesli No Added Sugar (½ cup)	210	4	1.5	
Bob's Red Mill Gluten Free Muesli (½ cup)	220	- 4	2.5	6
Back to Nature Chocolate Delight Granola (½ cup)	220	4	- 3	
General Mills Cheerios Protein—Cinnamon Almond or Oats & Honey (1¼ cups), average	220	4	4	7
Cascadian Farm Organic Apple Crisp Protein Granola (¾ <i>cup</i>)	230	4	3	10
Cascadian Farm Organic Cinnamon Raisin Granola (¾ cup)	230	4	4.5	5
Bear Naked Maple-icious Pecan Granola (1/2 cup)	260	. 4	2.5	6
Purely Elizabeth Original Ancient Grain Granola (gluten-free) (¾ cup) ^F	280	4	3	6
Nature's Path Organic Love Crunch Dark Chocolate & Red Berries Granola (½ cup)	280	4	3	4
Lärabar Renola Grain Free Granola (gluten- free) (14 cup), average of all flavors	340	4	3	9
Kind Healthy Grains Clusters—Banana Nut or Raspberry (gluten-free) (½ cup), average		3	1.5	4
Kellogg's Low Fat Original Granola (½ cup)	190	3	3.5	4
Kellogg's Smart Start Original Antioxidants (1 cup)	190	3 ^p	. 3.5	4
Post Honey Bunches of Oats Protein Granola with Dark Chocolate (½ cup)	220	3	3	10
Nature Valley Protein Granola (½ cup), average of all flavors	220	3	3.5	10
Quaker Real Medleys—Cherry Almond Pecan or Peach Apple Walnut (¾ cup)	240	3	3.5	5
Cascadian Farm Organic Oats and Honey Granola (१४ cup)	250	3	3.5	5
Kellogg's Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory Chocolatey Almond (1 cup)	220	1.	4.5	3
Ala/ Port Dito * Includes any naturally account			_:	

Best Bite. * Includes any naturally occurring sugar (typically from fruit) and/or added sugar. P Number includes added processed fiber. S Cereal contains acesulfame-potassium, sucralose, or monk fruit extract. F Contains at least 3 grams of saturated fat.

Daily Targets (for a 2,000-calorie diet): Fiber: at least 28 grams. Protein: 75 grams. Daily Added-Sugars Limit: 6 teaspoons (25 grams) for women, 9 teaspoons (38 grams) for men. (To convert teaspoons of sugar to grams, multiply by 4.2.)

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