DOG HEALTH AND NUTRITION SECRETS

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Dog Health and Nutrition Secrets

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Introduction

It’s no secret that we have a pretty unhealthy population of companion animals. Our pet population is sicker than ever before in history. During the course of veterinary practice, I have seen thousands of chronically ill animals, at incredibly young ages. Most disturbing is the increasing incidence of cancer in younger and younger pets.

We are also seeing a lot more allergies, a lot more skin and gum disease, arthritis, kidney problems, and especially autoimmune diseases – diseases in which a pet’s own immune system turns on them and begins attacking their healthy blood and skin.

There are potentially many reasons for this, but the biggest single factor that is adversely affecting the health of our pets overall, is food. Without a doubt, nutrition is key to the health of our pets. Feeding a natural, healthy diet is one of, if not the single most important changes that you as a pet owner can make for the long-term health of your pet.

What we are feeding our pets

In the (not-so-distant) past, dogs survived on prey that they hunted. They chewed on bones and in the process kept their teeth clean.

Pets have moved from the wilderness to the living room. They now wait (or demand) that we humans feed them. They feast on ready to eat packaged foods, and in many, many cases, this is harming our pets.

Commercial pet food does not always provide all of the nutrients that dogs need to be healthy at different times in their lives. Much of it contains nothing more than cheap grains (i.e. starch, corn), meat by-products, fillers, chemical additives and preservatives, and in many cases, toxins. Even if your pet’s food doesn’t contain contaminants, it does not necessarily contain everything your dog needs to stay healthy. More than likely it contains just what pets need to ‘get by’.

If you were to pick up a can of pet food 20 years ago, chances are you would see that the main ingredient was an animal protein. These days, the main ingredients are typically grain and fat, which is essentially just filler. They contain very little of the vitamins and minerals that actually make your pet thrive.
Grains have become prevalent because the high carbohydrate content provides cheap calories – animal protein costs food manufacturers more, so to cut costs, they increased the amount of grain. In addition, grains assist in binding ingredients, to make it easier to form kibble or dry food.

There are negative effects from feeding grain-based diets. Carnivores cannot maintain long-term production of the quantity of amylase enzyme necessary to properly digest and utilize carbohydrates. This contributes to some of the negative effects we see.

From Susan Wynn, DVM, on the canine diet:  "Dogs evolved from Canis lupis – the wolf. Wolves eat caribou or the like, but if they are forced, they will eat smaller game (rarely). They have been observed to graze on grass, eat berries, etc, but only when they need to. This is our lesson in canine nutrition – they are omnivores who do well with fresh meat, the vegetation they get in a caribou stomach (which is mostly green, unless the beast is eating from baited fields), and a smattering of other stuff if they are hungry."

Most commercial pet foods on the market do meet the minimum recommended daily allowances of vitamins and minerals. But remember – these ‘recommendations’ were created by the same industry that creates and profits from the food itself, and in my professional medical opinion, most aren’t enough to keep your pet from becoming sick.

Fortunately, more and more companies are aware of the problems commercial food has caused, and we’re seeing an increase in the number of very high quality pet foods available. Further on in this booklet is a list of a few recommended commercial foods that I would be comfortable feeding my own dog.

However, even that needs to be considered with caution. As many of us have seen, even some of the highest quality, premium pet food companies have issued recalls or have had problems with their foods.
Dog Health Problems Related to Pet Food

- **Allergies.** The most common proven allergens for dogs are beef, chicken, milk, eggs, corn, wheat, and soy.

- **Arthritis.** Often a result of joint wear and tear – but diet is key. If the appropriate diet is fed, your pet is less likely to be overweight and suffer from arthritis. Many premium diets have additional antioxidants, Glucosamine and EFAs (Essential Fatty Acids) which will aid in treating and preventing arthritis.

- **Dental Disease.** Often a result of dogs not having adequate abrasive food materials to regularly chew on. In the wild, dogs would both regularly crunch bones. Dog owners who feed raw food and bones have very healthy dogs with exceptionally clean teeth.

- **Kidney Failure.** Inadequate and improper protein sources and low moisture content (of dry foods) are the two major kidney stressors caused by commercial foods. The kidneys also take a hard hit from many toxins to which the body is exposed.

- **Urinary Infections and Crystals.** This is often caused by consumption of a dry, high carbohydrate diet. The classic example is the corn based dry food that produces a high urinary ph and concentrated urine.

- **Hyperthyroidism.** This is defined as enlarged thyroid glands and high levels of thyroid hormone in the blood. The increase of this has been attributed to chemicals in food.

- **Chronic Vomiting and Diarrhea.** The proteins in grains are less digestible than animal proteins.

- **Immune Disorders.** The immune system becomes irritated and weakened by the invasion of foreign, non-nutritive protein and carbohydrate particles. Allergies and other chronic immune problems may develop. In severe cases this can lead to Autoimmune Hemolytic Anemia.

- **Diabetes and Pancreatitis.** A pet’s pancreas will do its best to keep up with the demand for amylase. But over time the pancreas loses its ability to respond leading to inflammation, and severe vomiting/diarrhea. In other cases the pancreas is no longer able to produce insulin, resulting in diabetes.
• **Seizures.** Preservatives such as Ethoxyquin, BHT, and BHA should be avoided as they can cause seizures (refer to the following section). Many ‘supermarket’ foods are loaded with chemical dyes and preservatives. Purchase a high quality kibble made from ‘human grade’ ingredients – or better yet, cook for your pet. Please note: If your dog is taking potassium bromide, be very careful when you switch dog foods. Try to make sure the sodium content is the same as the previous food. Change over very slowly, whether it is the same sodium content or different, so that the absorption rate of the potassium bromide remains constant.

• **Cancer.** There are many dietary risk factors that are potentially contributing to cancer. These include smoke ‘flavor’, Ethoxyquin, artificial food color, sodium nitrite, sodium hexametaphosphate, propylene glycol, l-alanine, artificial flavors, petrolatum, BHA, TBHQ.
Reading Pet Food Labels

Pet food labels can be deceiving. They can be difficult to read and in many cases, difficult to understand, so it is very important to learn how to read them correctly. The bag may be pretty – it may have pictures of ‘wholesome’ ingredients – but what is actually in the food is far more important than what is on the bag.

In understanding labels, here are some important factors to consider.

1. The first ingredient and top 5 ingredients

   The top 5 ingredients usually account for 70% or more of a dry pet food’s entire formula – by focusing on these ingredients, you can determine if a food is of good quality.

   The first ingredient is the most important because there is more of that ingredient than any other. All dog foods must list the ingredients in order of weight.

2. How ingredients are listed on the labels (more ‘marketing confusion’)

   A classic example is with corn. By listing it in ‘subsections’, it can appear to make up less of the content of the food than it really does. For example, corn can be broken down into corn gluten, ground corn, corn bran… but if these were lumped together as just ‘corn’, then it would be higher up on the label – in many cases in the number one spot, as the primary ingredient. Ensure that the food you feed your pet does not have this.

3. The carbohydrate content – and what is healthier

   Corn, wheat and soy have been linked to allergic reactions in dogs, and are not easy to digest. The primary ingredient in many dry commercial pet foods is not protein but a carbohydrate. Corn and wheat are the most common grains used, but as with the meat sources, the nutritious parts of the grain are generally present only in trace amounts. The corn gluten meal or wheat middlings added to pet foods are the leftovers after the grain has been processed for human use, containing little nutritional value.
4. Natural preservatives and artificial colors or flavors

Artificial color and chemical preservatives like BHA, BHT, Ethoxyquin, and propylene glycol provide no nutritional value and have been associated with toxic side effects – the most important one of these being cancer (see previous section).

5. Animal by-products

These include more than just the ‘extra’ parts derived from slaughtered animals (such as lungs, spleen, kidneys, and brain). In her book, ‘Foods Pets Die For’, Anne Martin highlights the huge number of harmful and completely non-nutritious ingredients that may be added to dog food. A few of these unsavory ingredients include: meat and poultry by-products unfit for human consumption (infested with worms, diseased products), necks, feet, undeveloped eggs, intestines, egg shells, infertile and un-hatched eggs, culled, dried and ground chicks, heads, feet, and viscera, hydrolyzed poultry feather (indigestible protein, but still considered protein), hydrolyzed hair, spray-dried animal blood, dehydrated food-waste, artificially dried animal and vegetable waste, dehydrated paunch products, dried poultry and swine waste, un-dried processed animal waste, companion animals from clinics, pounds, and shelters, dead stock (production animals as well as road kill that cannot be buried at roadside, and zoo animals), frozen meat marked as ‘unfit for human consumption’, rendered and ‘denatured’ (a process using crude carbolic acid, fuel oil, or citronella) slaughterhouse products, restaurant and supermarket refuse.

6. Protein levels

To properly compare protein levels, use a ‘dry matter’ comparison, especially when comparing protein levels between canned (wet) or dry foods.

All pet foods have different levels of moisture. Canned foods can have up to 80% moisture whereas some dry foods can have as little as 6%. The following shows how to calculate protein levels for comparison.

If a dry food has 10% moisture, it therefore has 90% dry matter. If the label states that the protein level is 20%, divide the 20% protein by the 90% dry matter and we get 22% – this is the amount of protein on a dry matter basis.
In order to compare this to canned food that has 80% moisture, we do the same conversion. A can with 80% moisture has 20% dry matter. If this particular canned food states 5% protein, take the 5% and divide it by 20% (the dry matter portion) – the result is 25% protein on a dry matter basis. In this case, the canned food has more protein per pound on a dry matter basis than the stated 20% protein of the dry food.

7. Nutritional Adequacy

The nutritional adequacy statement is important because it will state what species and life-stage the product is intended for, and whether the food is a complete diet or meant to be a complementary product (a treat).

In the United States, AAFCO (the Association of American Feed Control Officials) permits pet food manufacturers a choice of methods for proving the nutritional adequacy of their products. The first method is by calculation. Using information on the nutrient content of the ingredients (from food composition tables), the manufacturer shows that the product meets established nutrient guidelines.

The second method is by analysis. The manufacturer analyses the finished product and shows that it meets established nutrient guidelines.

Finally, the manufacturer can run feeding trials. AAFCO has devised protocols for feeding trials for gestation/lactation, growth, and maintenance. The criteria for adequacy include growth rate, development, clinical health, hematological responses, and reproductive/lactation performance. Obviously, the feeding trial method is the most stringent and biologically relevant method for showing nutritional adequacy. It is also the most expensive.

8. Shelf Life

If there is no ‘best before date’ – be very wary. Expect to see this on the bag. Also, a phone number should be provided, so you can contact a company representative if there is a problem with the food.

9. Source of the Ingredients

Many labels currently do not provide easily accessible information about nutrient content, caloric density, quality and identity of ingredients (including slaughter
practices and presence of GMOs), bioavailability of nutrients, standards of nutritional adequacy, freshness and stability, and quality assurance practices in manufacturing.

Ideally, the source of the ingredients would be found on the label, but it is not the norm. You will usually have to contact to the company to find out. Here are some important questions to ask:

- Does the company have their own manufacturing plants or do they contract with an outside feed mill or manufacturing plant?
- Where does the company get their raw ingredients? Are they from established sources or do the sources vary? What kind of standards does the company have for raw ingredients? Do they do any testing in-house before using an ingredient for manufacturing?
- What kind of testing does the company do at the end of each run? Do they hold the product for shipment until this testing is completed?
- Does the company do stability testing of their products? Do they know the shelf life of their product? Do they put ‘Best Used By’ dates on their product?
Pet Food: Options for a Healthier Pet

Now that you are completely petrified of regular commercial food, what are your options? Well, there are three main choices you have:

1. Feed a home cooked diet
2. Feed a raw food diet (that you make or purchase)
3. Feed a quality commercial food

I use a combination of all three. I feed my dog a high quality commercial food, but I also make home cooked meals for him a couple of times per week, and at least one day per week provide raw meals.

What makes a good pet food?

It is important to know the specific ingredients that should be in healthy dog foods. Pet food does not have to be as complicated as most food companies (and many veterinarians) would have you believe. Healthy pet food is comprised of very simple, basic ingredients.

Good pet food will contain the following:

- Real meat, such as chicken, lamb, beef, bison, deer, or fish, as the primary ingredient. These are sources of high-quality, highly digestible protein. Proteins are essential for growth, maintenance, reproduction, repair and energy.

- Vegetables and fruit provide essential phytonutrients, antioxidants and enzymes, plus natural vitamins, minerals and fibers. As with us, vegetables and fruit have been shown to promote health and wellness.

- If there is a carbohydrate, it should be whole grains such as brown rice, barley and oats – these are complex carbohydrates. These are helpful in maintaining your dog’s energy level, but carbohydrates are not necessarily required for dogs.
Advised Commercial Pet Food List

Here is a list of a few quality natural commercial foods. There are many others, but these are foods that my clients or I have had success with.

Artemis – Holistic Pet Food
Back to Basics
Bravo Raw Diet
Champion Petfoods, Ltd.
FirstMate Pet Foods
Halo
(The) Honest Kitchen
Life’s Abundance by Healthy Pet Net
Natura Pet Products
Nature’s Variety
Petcurean Pet Nutrition
Primal Pet Foods
Solid Gold Health Food for Pets
Steve’s Real Food, Inc.
VeRUS Pet Foods
Wysong

Azmira Holistic Animal Care Products
Blue Buffalo
Canidae
Dogswell
Flint River Ranch
Holistic Blend
Kumpi
mORIGINS
Nature’s Logic
Paw Naturaw
PHD Products
Rudy Green's Doggy Cuisine
Stella and Chewy’s
TimberWolf Organics
Wellness
Home Diets

In light of the Pet Food Recall of 2007, many pet owners have begun (or more appropriately, returned) to feeding homemade diets. With a home diet, you have the advantage of knowing exactly what you are feeding your pet, at least to a much higher degree than with commercial food.

You can pre-make large batches, freeze it, and then add vitamin/mineral supplements when it’s time to feed. Any vitamin or mineral supplement you use should be a good quality, human grade supplement, if you are not using one specifically designed for pets (such as my own dog supplement, Dr. Jones’ Ultimate Canine Health Formula). Some of the cheaper human supplements, particularly those with a heavy coating, are not well digested.

With human supplements, the average supplement is designed for a 150 pound adult. A dog dosage can be calculated from the weight of the dog compared to 150 pounds. Be careful with dosages, as some vitamins and many minerals are toxic at high doses. If you use bone meal as a calcium supplement, you must use the edible, human grade, not bone meal intended for gardening or plants.

A Balanced Diet

The ‘professionals’ in the pet food industry (and this includes most Veterinarians as well) will have you believe that it is very difficult to make a balanced home diet. This isn’t true, and in most cases, isn’t nearly as important as it’s made out to be.

A correctly balanced diet is not something necessary for each and every meal, but something achieved over a period of time. If you feed a variety of foods over a period of two weeks, and you include what is necessary across the different meals, your pet’s diet will balance out over time.

Most of us, for convenience, will still feed our pets primarily a commercial diet, and only provide an occasional homemade meal. So for most of us, ensuring a perfectly balanced home diet is not necessary, as our pets will receive anything lacking in their home diet from the commercial food (assuming we feed a high quality commercial food).
If you are feeding a home diet exclusively, then balance is important. Again, as long as
you are following good recipes (such as those recommended in this book) and vary the
diet over time, your pet will receive what they need.

**Calcium and Phosphorus**

The mineral most discussed with respect to home diets is calcium, and the calcium to
phosphorus balance. Both minerals are essential for health, but in most diets, there is
more than adequate phosphorus and not enough calcium. Meat contains a very high
proportion of phosphorus (approximately 1 part calcium to 10 parts phosphorus), and
because meat is the primary ingredient in home diets, additional calcium is necessary.
The ratio of calcium to phosphorus in a pet’s diet should be approximately 1.2:1.

In a completely natural diet, an animal in the wild will eat a large portion of bones, which
will provide the calcium needed. With raw diets (see the following section), bones are an
integral part, but not so with a cooked home diet, so a calcium supplement must be
added.

The recommended amount of dietary calcium for an average 50 lb adult dog is roughly
1,500 - 2,000 mg daily (of calcium carbonate form).

For simplicity, in most of the diets I recommend, I suggest adding a calcium carbonate
tablet as the calcium supplement, but you can substitute with alternate sources, such as
food grade bone meal, ground eggshells, or others. As an example, one large (ground to
powder) eggshell will provide approximately 2,000 mg of calcium carbonate.
Homemade Dog Food Recipes

The Basic Dog Diet - for healthy pets over 6 months old

Fresh boneless skinless chicken breast - 1 pound
Cooked white rice - 2 and 2/3 cup
Flax oil - 1 Tablespoon
Ultimate Canine Health Formula - 2 Scoops

OR Add the following:

Morton's lite salt - 1/4 tsp
Iodinated salt - 1/4 tsp
Calcium carbonate without vitamin D (regular Tums - check size) - 3 grams
Adult multivitamin-mineral supplement (no special senior, ocular, women's or other versions) - 1 tablet

Saute chopped chicken breast in oil until thoroughly cooked. Add rice and salt.

Grind Tums (calcium carbonate) and multi vitamin/mineral tab together. Add to cooled mixture. Store in refrigerator. Larger batches may be prepared in advance and stored in the freezer (although add minerals & supplements to mix after thawing and re-heating).
Dog Fish and Sweet Potato Recipe (based on a seventy-five-pound dog)

Baked sweet potato 4 cups
Cooked Fish, trout 1½ cups

PLUS

1½ scoops Dr. Jones’ Ultimate Canine Health Formula

OR:

Fish Oil 5 teaspoons
One A Day multivitamin/mineral supplement 2 tablets
Posture caplet (600 mg elemental calcium) 2½ caplets
Morton Lite Salt Mixture 1 teaspoon

Cook protein, carbohydrate and vegetables. Prior to serving each meal and after warming, add the appropriate amount of supplement to the food. Mix thoroughly. Heating supplements that contain vitamins can destroy their effectiveness. The amount of supplement shown above is the daily amount.
Chicken and Rice Recipe (based on a 75 lb dog)

White, long grain Rice, cooked - 5 cups

Vegetable oil - 6 teaspoons

Cooked chicken breast - 2 cups

Posture caplet (600 mg elemental calcium) - 5 caplets

Ultimate Canine Health Formula - 2 Scoops

OR Add the following:

Multivitamin/multimineral Supplement - 2 tablets

Morton Lite Salt Mixture - 1 1/2 teaspoons

Cook Protein, Carbohydrate and Vegetables.

These recipes represent the amount to be fed per day and can be fed in multiple meals. More than one day’s worth of the food can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 2 weeks.

Prior to serving each meal and after warming, add the appropriate amount of supplement to the food. Mix thoroughly. Heating supplements that contain vitamins can destroy their effectiveness.

The amount of supplement(s) shown above is the daily amount. Therefore, please divide the amount listed by the number of meals given a day.
Raw Food

Prior to the early 1900s, our dogs were fed butcher’s scraps, leftovers, and if that wasn’t available, they hunted and scavenged for themselves. Cats were primarily kept for pest control, and survived on the mice they caught along with the occasional bowl of milk or meat handout from their owners. In the early part of the century, commercially prepared foods—biscuits, canned food and finally kibble—replaced our pets more natural diets.

Recent years, however, have seen a rise in the popularity of raw food diets.

Supplying your dog or cat with raw foods is a safe and healthy alternative to commercially produced foods. There are numerous raw food diets out there for pet owners to try.

Health benefits of raw food

There are many benefits that have been reported by pet owners after they have switched their pets to a raw food diet, and I have seen this in my practice. Here is a list of improvements that pet owners have experienced:

- shinier hair coat
- eliminated dog odor
- better body muscle to fat ratios
- cleaner teeth and breath
- decreased itching
- normalized energy levels
- improved urinary tract health
- better resistance to infections
- increased mobility with a decrease in arthritis pain
- decreased allergy symptoms
- little to no hair balls in cats
- lower stool volume
Not all pets will experience all of the health benefits listed above, but most pet owners report that their pet experiences one of more of these benefits after switching over to a raw food diet.\(^1\)

Additional benefits may include not having to make as many trips to the veterinarian—a healthier pet, fewer vet bills. Another potential advantage is that, in general, raw diets are less expensive than (premium) commercial diets if you prepare the raw diet yourself, at home.

**Raw food concerns**

Salmonella and E. coli are not well-documented concerns for pets, and are rarely seen by pet owners who currently feed raw diets. The intestinal tracts of dogs and cats are designed for handling and digesting raw meats. When raw meat is ingested, the stomach pH goes to a highly acidic pH of 1, making it very difficult for these organisms to survive. The short digestive tract of a carnivore enables the food to be digested and ready to go (as feces) within six hours, before the bacteria can become a problem.

To prevent the spreading of any potentially harmful bacteria, take a few extra precautions. Bacteria are normally transmitted through what is known as fecal-oral contact—handling waste and then inadvertently touching the mouth. The best way to protect yourself is simple: use common sense and practice good hygiene. If you are ill, do not feed raw food to your pet (have someone else do it), and do not handle any waste. Anyone who is sick or has a poor immune system has a higher chance of passing something on to their pet or being susceptible to disease themselves.

An additional concern is choking on bones and intestinal obstruction/perforation. These events are rare, but they are still possible. Most dogs and cats chew the bones well, breaking them down into small pieces that pass through the intestinal tract quickly. Some dogs and cats still manage to eat bones and choke on them, usually by eating them too quickly. To prevent this, chop up the bones into small pieces prior to feeding. When cats are fed raw meat with bones, the food should always be chopped up into very small pieces, one-quarter inch or smaller. Never feed whole chicken necks to cats.

An easy way to avoid these issues is to buy one of the commercially prepared raw diets—they include everything needed, including chopped-up bones.

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If you are going to prepare raw food on your own, make sure you feed from four principal raw food ‘groups:’

- Meat
- Bones
- Organ meats
- Fruits and vegetables

It is easiest to feed chicken as the meat and bone source if you are preparing the meat fresh. Chicken backs and thighs are inexpensive, and a great way to start. After purchasing the chicken, wrap each piece individually and freeze it. Defrost it overnight, and then chop it up in the morning. Defrosting the chicken for approximately nine hours allows it to become slightly soft, but not rubbery, and therefore easiest to chop.

**A balanced diet**

Bones (or bone meal or an alternate supplement) are a must with a raw diet. Many people starting out may avoid adding bones, feeling that meat is the most important part of the diet. This is not true as calcium is essential for health.

Be sure to balance the amount of meat fed with bones or bone meal, as meat is very high in phosphorus and contains little to no calcium. The correct balance of phosphorus to calcium is approximately 1.3 parts calcium to one part phosphorus. A good example of a correct meat-to-bone ratio is with chicken necks, backs, or wings: if you base your proportion on these samples, you’ll have a good balance. Always keep in mind how your pet would eat in the wild—not just meat but also a large portion of bones.

Vary the meat sources from time to time to provide a variety of nutrients to your dog or cat. An easy way to do this is to purchase commercial raw diets and feed these from time to time. These generally cost about two to three times as much as your home-prepared chicken, but they contain chopped-up meats, bones, organs, vegetables, and other ingredients.

Feeding raw isn’t an exact science. Rest assured that over time, by varying the protein sources and amounts of bones and other ingredients you feed, your pet will receive a balanced diet.

**How much do I feed?**
This will also vary with your dog or cat. A dog that is more active and has a higher metabolism will eat more, while a less active dog or one with a slower metabolism will eat less. Puppies will typically eat more than adults, since they need to fuel their rapidly growing body.

As a general guideline, you can feed one pound of food per fifty pounds of dog. Rapidly growing dogs and active dogs tend to need more; older dogs and inactive dogs tend to need less. If your dog gains weight on this amount, then decrease it; if your dog loses weight on this amount, increase it.

Meats that are lower in fat include turkey, buffalo, ostrich, venison, and rabbit. Meats that are higher in fat and help put weight on include beef, lamb, duck, and pork.
About Dr. Andrew Jones

Dr. Andrew Jones is a Veterinarian in Nelson BC, Canada. He has developed a special interest in natural and alternative ways to heal pets, and has written and produced several books, videos and countless articles on at-home pet health care. He has also developed a unique home study course on pet healing titled “Dr. Jones’ Natural Animal Care Home Study Course”. Although no longer in practice, Dr. Jones’ goal is to empower pet owners to take a much more active role in caring for their pet’s health.

http://www.veterinarysecretsrevealed.com/gettingstarted/
http://www.thedogsupplement.com
http://www.thecatsupplement.com

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