

The Role of Nurses in Promoting Breastfeeding: Encouragement, Adherence, and Challenges for Maternal and Child Health

O Papel do Enfermeiro na Promoção do Aleitamento Materno: Incentivo, Adesão e Desafios para a Saúde Materno-Infantil

El Papel del Enfermero en la Promoción de la Lactancia Materna: Incentivo, Adhesión y Desafíos para la Salud Materno-infantil

RESUMO

Introdução: O aleitamento materno é essencial para a saúde materno-infantil, promovendo o desenvolvimento saudável do bebê e fortalecendo o vínculo entre mãe e filho. No entanto, diversos desafios, como falta de informação, dificuldades na pega correta e fatores socioculturais, impactam a adesão à amamentação. O enfermeiro desempenha um papel crucial no incentivo, orientação e suporte à amamentação, atuando desde o pré-natal até o período puerperal. **Objetivo:** Analisar a influência do enfermeiro no incentivo e na adesão ao aleitamento materno, ressaltando as principais estratégias empregadas, os desafios enfrentados e suas contribuições para a saúde materno-infantil. **Materiais e métodos:** Trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica integrativa, realizada em bases de dados científicas, incluindo SciELO, BVS, PubMed, BDENF, LILACS, CINAHL, Web of Science e Cochrane. A busca foi conduzida entre fevereiro e abril de 2025, utilizando descritores relacionados ao aleitamento materno, enfermagem e saúde materno-infantil. A pesquisa, uma revisão bibliográfica integrativa, analisou 10 artigos, foram incluídos artigos publicados entre 2020 e 2025, disponíveis na íntegra e em português ou inglês. **Resultados/Discussão:** A análise dos estudos demonstrou que a atuação do enfermeiro no incentivo à amamentação é fundamental para melhorar as taxas de aleitamento materno exclusivo. Ações como orientação pré-natal, suporte no puerpério, identificação precoce de dificuldades e acolhimento emocional impactam diretamente a adesão materna. No entanto, desafios como falta de capacitação, alta demanda de trabalho e mitos culturais ainda dificultam a implementação eficaz dessas estratégias. O fortalecimento das políticas públicas e a capacitação contínua dos enfermeiros são fundamentais para aprimorar esse cenário. **Considerações finais/Conclusão:** O estudo evidencia a importância do enfermeiro no incentivo ao aleitamento materno, destacando estratégias eficazes, desafios enfrentados e sua contribuição para a saúde materno-infantil, reforçando a necessidade de valorização profissional e fortalecimento das políticas públicas de apoio à amamentação.

DESCRIPTORES: Aleitamento Materno; Enfermagem; Promoção da Saúde; Atenção Primária à Saúde e Saúde Materno-Infantil.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Breastfeeding is essential for maternal and child health, promoting the healthy development of the infant and strengthening the bond between mother and child. However, several challenges such as lack of information, difficulties with proper latch, and sociocultural factors affect adherence to breastfeeding. Nurses play a crucial role in encouraging, guiding, and supporting breastfeeding, working from prenatal care through the postpartum period. **Objective:** To analyze the influence of nurses in promoting and supporting adherence to breastfeeding, highlighting the main strategies employed, the challenges faced, and their contributions to maternal and child health. **Materials and Methods:** This is an integrative literature review conducted in scientific databases, including SciELO, BVS, PubMed, BDENF, LILACS, CINAHL, Web of Science, and Cochrane. The search was carried out between February and April 2025, using descriptors related to breastfeeding, nursing, and maternal and child health. The integrative review analyzed ten articles published between 2020 and 2025, available in full text and in Portuguese or English. **Results/Discussion:** The analysis of the studies demonstrated that the role of nurses in promoting breastfeeding is fundamental for improving exclusive bre-

astfeeding rates. Actions such as prenatal guidance, postpartum support, early identification of difficulties, and emotional support directly influence maternal adherence. However, challenges such as lack of training, high workload, and cultural myths still hinder the effective implementation of these strategies. Strengthening public policies and continuous nurse training are essential to improving this scenario. **Considerations/Conclusion:** The study highlights the importance of nurses in promoting breastfeeding, emphasizing effective strategies, challenges faced, and their contributions to maternal and child health, reinforcing the need for professional recognition and stronger public policies supporting breastfeeding.

DESCRIPTORS: Breastfeeding; Nursing; Health Promotion; Primary Health Care; Maternal and Child Health.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La lactancia materna es esencial para la salud maternoinfantil, ya que promueve el desarrollo saludable del bebé y fortalece el vínculo entre la madre y el hijo. Sin embargo, diversos desafíos, como la falta de información, las dificultades en el agarre correcto y los factores socioculturales, influyen en la adherencia a la lactancia. El enfermero desempeña un papel fundamental en el incentivo, la orientación y el apoyo a la lactancia materna, actuando desde el período prenatal hasta el puerperio. **Objetivo:** Analizar la influencia del enfermero en el incentivo y la adherencia a la lactancia materna, destacando las principales estrategias empleadas, los desafíos enfrentados y sus contribuciones a la salud maternoinfantil. **Materiales y métodos:** Se trata de una investigación bibliográfica integradora, realizada en bases de datos científicas, incluyendo SciELO, BVS, PubMed, BDENF, LILACS, CINAHL, Web of Science y Cochrane. La búsqueda se llevó a cabo entre febrero y abril de 2025, utilizando descriptores relacionados con la lactancia materna, enfermería y salud maternoinfantil. La revisión integradora analizó 10 artículos, incluyendo estudios publicados entre 2020 y 2025, disponibles en texto completo y en portugués o inglés. **Resultados/Discusión:** El análisis de los estudios demostró que la actuación del enfermero en el incentivo a la lactancia materna es fundamental para mejorar las tasas de lactancia materna exclusiva. Acciones como la orientación prenatal, el apoyo en el puerperio, la identificación temprana de dificultades y la contención emocional influyen directamente en la adherencia materna. No obstante, desafíos como la falta de capacitación, la alta demanda laboral y los mitos culturales aún dificultan la implementación efectiva de estas estrategias. El fortalecimiento de las políticas públicas y la capacitación continua de los enfermeros son esenciales para mejorar este escenario. **Consideraciones finales/Conclusión:** El estudio evidencia la importancia del enfermero en el incentivo a la lactancia materna, destacando estrategias eficaces, los desafíos enfrentados y su contribución a la salud maternoinfantil, reforzando la necesidad de valorización profesional y del fortalecimiento de las políticas públicas de apoyo a la lactancia. **DESCRIPTORES:** Lactancia Materna; Enfermería; Promoción de la Salud; Atención Primaria de Salud; Salud Maternoinfantil.

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INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is widely recognized as the most appropriate form of feeding for infants, providing all the essential nutrients for healthy growth and development, as well as contributing to the formation of the bond between mother and child. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), breast milk should be the baby's only source of nutrition until six months of age and supplemented with other foods until at least two years of age. However, despite scientific evidence proving its benefits, adherence to breastfeeding still faces challenges, such as lack of information, difficulties in correct latching, and sociocultural influences that can negatively impact this practice.^{1; 19.}

The rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life is still below globally established targets. Factors such as early return to work, the absence of incentive policies, and the spread of myths and popular beliefs interfere with the continuity of breastfeeding. In this context, nursing plays a fundamental role in educating, supporting, and monitoring nursing mothers, which is essential for promoting and adhering to breastfeeding.^{2; 5.}

Nurses, as health professionals directly involved in maternal and child care, have a responsibility to guide and encourage breastfeeding from the prenatal period onwards, providing evidence-based information on the importance of breast milk and the correct breastfeeding technique. Maternal education during pregnancy is essential to prepare women for the challenges of breastfeeding, preventing future difficulties and reinforcing the importance of this practice.^{4; 16.}

During the postpartum period, the support provided by nurses is crucial for the continuation of breastfeeding. Studies indicate that nursing care di-

rectly influences the duration and adherence to breastfeeding, since many women face difficulties such as pain, nipple fissures, and the perception of insufficient milk supply. By identifying and intervening early in these situations, nurses reduce the chances of early weaning and reinforce maternal confidence in breastfeeding.^{8; 17.}

In addition to technical support, nurses play an essential role in humanizing care by providing emotional support to mothers, who often feel insecure and pressured about breastfeeding. An empathetic and welcoming approach positively influences the mother's decision to continue breastfeeding, reinforcing the importance of this practice for the health of the baby and the mother.^{11; 16.}

The relevance of this topic to public health and society can be summarized in the following guiding question: how can nurses positively influence adherence to and continuity of breastfeeding? The answer to this question lies in understanding that breastfeeding is not only an individual choice, but an essential strategy for promoting child health, preventing disease, and reducing neonatal morbidity and mortality.^{14; 19.}

OBJECTIVE

To analyze the influence of nurses in encouraging and adhering to breastfeeding, highlighting the main strategies employed, the challenges faced, and their contributions to maternal and child health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted through an integrative literature review, with the objective of gathering and analyzing scientific evidence on the impact of intervention strategies on breastfeeding, focusing on the role of nurses in encouraging and promoting breastfeeding.

The research was conducted in journals indexed in the following databases: Nursing Database (BDENF), Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Library (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (PUBMED/MEDLINE), Web of Science, EMBASE, SCOPUS, Cochrane, and the Virtual Health Libraries and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), using search strategies specifically designed for each database.

The electronic search took place between February and April 2025. To compose the search strategy, words in English and Portuguese were used: "Breastfeeding" AND "Nursing" AND "Health Promotion" AND "Maternal and Child Health."

The inclusion criteria for articles were defined as publications from the last five years (2020 to 2025) in English and Portuguese. Paid articles, incomplete articles, studies without results, or studies whose focus did not answer the research question were excluded.

The inclusion criteria adopted for the selection of articles were: publications available in full, written in Portuguese and English, published between 2020 and 2025, and addressing topics related to the role of nurses in breastfeeding. As exclusion criteria, articles that did not meet the criteria of language, accessibility, or relevance to the proposed theme were discarded.

The selection of articles followed a rigorous protocol, ensuring the updating and relevance of the studies included in the review. Data analysis was performed systematically, allowing the identification of trends, challenges, and contributions of nurses in promoting breastfeeding.

The keywords used in the search were extracted from the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) website: Breastfeeding; Nursing; Health Promotion; Primary Health Care; and Maternal and Child Health.

Table 1: Distribution of periodical databases used to survey scientific articles

Location	N	%
Brazilian Journal of Nursing	1	5,88
VHL	2	11,76
PubMed	1	5,88
Nursing in Focus	1	5,88
Brazilian Journals	1	5,88
Scielo	5	29,41
Journal of the USP School of Nursing	1	5,88
Nursing Education Perspectives	1	5,88
Care Research Journal	1	5,88
UFPE Nursing Journal	1	5,88
WHO – WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION	1	5,88
Frontiers Of Nursing	1	5,88
Total	17	100%

Source: Prepared by the authors themselves.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After applying the eligibility criteria, 70 articles were identified, of which

53 were excluded because they did not address the central theme of the research, resulting in the analysis of 17 articles in this study.

The objective of this study was to analyze the influence of nurses in encouraging and promoting breastfeeding adherence, highlighting the main strategies employed, the challenges faced, and their contributions to maternal and child health. The findings demonstrate that the role of nurses is extremely relevant in this process, since they are continuously and directly present at various levels of health care, playing an essential role in promoting, protecting, and supporting breastfeeding.^{18; 19.}

The role of nurses in the breastfeeding process is multifaceted, ranging from prenatal education to postpartum follow-up, and is essential for building an effective support network for nursing mothers. The continuous presence of these professionals at different stages of maternal and child care

enhances adherence to breastfeeding practices.^{18; 19.}

During prenatal care, nurses have the opportunity to carry out educational activities aimed at preparing pregnant women for breastfeeding, using effective teaching resources and communication strategies. These guidelines help to demystify incorrect information and strengthen women's bond with breastfeeding even before the baby is born.^{18; 19.}

The nursing consultation is a privileged space for qualified listening, identifying fears, doubts, and expectations of pregnant women regarding the breastfeeding process. In this scenario, nurses can establish a relationship of trust that will favor the continuity of care in the postpartum period.^{18; 19.}

Among the most effective strategies identified are educational activities developed during prenatal care and the postpartum period, such as lectures, discussion groups, individual guidance, and the use of educational materials focusing on breastfeeding techniques, the benefits of breast milk, and the prevention of common difficulties. These actions contribute significantly to the knowledge, awareness, and empowerment of pregnant

women and new mothers, promoting adherence to exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life. In addition, the presence of a nurse in the immediate postpartum period, assisting with correct latching, positioning of the baby, and encouraging skin-to-skin contact, plays a crucial role in the early initiation of breastfeeding.^{14; 16.}

In the immediate postpartum period, early intervention by nurses is crucial to the success of breastfeeding. Assistance with the first feeding, encouragement of skin-to-skin contact, and verification of proper latching and positioning are actions that directly impact the initiation of breastfeeding.^{2; 12.}

Studies indicate that qualified nursing care in the immediate postpartum period is associated with increased rates of exclusive breastfeeding by reducing the technical difficulties faced by postpartum women, such as nipple fissures and pain during feeding.^{2; 12.}

Longitudinal follow-up through home visits or outpatient care allows nurses to continuously assess the breastfeeding process, offering personalized support, especially to women in situations of social, cultural, or economic vulnerability.^{2; 12.}

Integrative Review

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Figure 1: Nurse assisting a mother with breastfeeding.



Source: <https://gbringel.com/enfermeiro-obstetra-leitamento-materno/>.

Follow-up through home visits and outpatient care has also proven to be an important strategy for maintaining breastfeeding, especially among women in socially vulnerable situations.^{7; 9.}

In addition to technical support, nurses play a fundamental emotional and educational role, acting as a link between health services and the family. Active listening and welcoming have proven to be powerful resources for building trust and security among breastfeeding women, reducing the anxiety and feelings of insecurity that are common at the beginning of breastfeeding. Establishing this professional-emotional bond not only encourages adherence to breastfeeding, but also provides a more positive and humanized experience for women during this delicate period.^{7; 9.}

Active listening is an essential tool in nursing care, as it allows nurses to

understand the individual context of the nursing mother, her beliefs, limitations, and needs. This approach promotes humanized, woman-centered care.^{1; 5.}

In addition to technical support, nurses play an educational role, guiding not only women but also their family support network, which contributes to an environment more conducive to maintaining breastfeeding.^{1; 5.}

The role of nurses as facilitators of maternal empowerment is fundamental. By conveying confidence, well-founded information, and acceptance, professionals strengthen women's autonomy in decisions related to breastfeeding.^{1; 5.}

Figure 2: Campaign to encourage breastfeeding.



Source: <https://www.cofen.gov.br/campanha-nacional-busca-estimular-leitamentomaterno/>.

In many contexts, nurses are the first health professionals to have contact with nursing mothers after childbirth, which gives them significant responsibility for promoting and continuing breastfeeding.^{1, 5.}

The support of nurses is also relevant in the early identification of complications that may compromise breastfeeding, such as mastitis, ductal obstructions, or signs of hypogalactia, enabling timely interventions and preventing early weaning.^{1, 5.}

An important aspect observed in

the studies analyzed is the effectiveness of the continuous support provided by nurses, especially when there is coordination with other members of the multidisciplinary team. The integration between primary care professionals, community agents, nutritionists, and pediatricians enhances the impact of actions aimed at promoting breastfeeding. When care is coordinated and focused on the needs of the woman and baby, the results are even more significant, both in terms of the duration and quality of breastfeeding.^{1, 5.}

However, the work of nurses is not without challenges. Work overload, especially in primary health care units, limits the time available for individualized care and more detailed guidance. In addition, many professionals report a lack of continuing education and updating on new guidelines and techniques for breastfeeding management, which can compromise the quality of care. This gap highlights the need for investment in continuing education and institutional support to ensure the autonomy and safety of nurses in their clinical practice.^{2, 3.}

Figure 3: Benefits of breastfeeding.



Source: <https://www.gov.br/ans/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/sobre-ans/semana-mundial-daamamentacao-destaca-a-responsabilidade-de-todos>.

Continuous training of nurses is essential for quality care. Mastery of up-to-date evidence on breastfeeding management techniques, public policies, and breastfeeding rights makes their actions more effective.^{1, 5.}

Nurses also act as liaisons between different health sectors, promoting the integration of breastfeeding care with other services, such as childcare, nutrition, and psychosocial care.^{2, 3.}

The development of institutional protocols to support breastfeeding with the active participation of nurses contributes to standardizing practices and strengthening multidisciplinary action, ensuring greater effectiveness of interventions.^{2, 3.}

Figure 4: World Breastfeeding Week.



Source: <https://www.fsp.usp.br/sustentarea/2018/08/01/semana-mundial-dealeitamento-materno/>

The creation and maintenance of physical spaces suitable for breastfeeding, such as support rooms, can also be coordinated by nurses, ensuring privacy, comfort, and encouragement to breastfeed when returning to work.^{6; 10.}

Recognizing the importance of nurses as key players in maternal and child care promotes their professional value, which has a positive impact on motivation and the quality of care provided.^{6; 10.}

In the context of primary health care, nurses play a strategic role in monitoring breastfeeding, identifying cases of weaning risk early and intervening promptly.^{6; 10.}

Another limiting factor identified was the persistence of cultural beliefs

and myths, often reinforced by family members and the media, which cast doubt on the sufficiency and quality of breast milk. Situations such as early return to work, lack of adequate maternity leave, or ignorance of breastfeeding rights also represent significant barriers to the continuation of exclusive breastfeeding. In these contexts, the role of nurses as educators and advocates for the rights of breastfeeding women is even more relevant.^{11; 17.}

The strengthening of the breastfeeding support network, which includes mothers' groups, discussion groups, and community actions, is often led by nurses, whose work promotes female leadership and the sharing of experiences among women.

The work of nurses also contributes to reducing health inequalities by ensuring that women in vulnerable situations have access to reliable information and the support they need to breastfeed.^{11; 17.}

The humanization of care is one of the pillars of nursing, and breastfeeding is a particularly sensitive moment that requires acceptance, empathy, and respect for women's choices.^{11; 17.}

By recognizing the uniqueness of each mother-baby pair, nurses avoid imposing behaviors and act based on listening and dialogue, respecting women's autonomy and encouraging their voluntary adherence to breastfeeding.^{11; 17.}

Table 2: Characteristics of the publications used in this study, 2023.

LOCATION	AUTHOR	YEAR	TITLE	CONCLUSION
Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem	CHRISTOFFEL, Marialda Moreira et al.	2022	Exclusive breastfeeding and professionals from the family health strategy.	The study analyzes how health professionals perceive and promote exclusive breastfeeding in primary care.
BVS	GARCÉS, Mónica Guadalupe Paredes et al.	2023	The role of nursing in breastfeeding in hospitalized neonates.	The study analyzes perceptions about breastfeeding in hospitalized neonates and the relationship between good latching and milk production.
Enfermagem em Foco	IOPP, Patricia Hoffmann et al.	2023	A ATUAÇÃO DO ENFERMEIRO NA PROMOÇÃO, INCENTIVO E MANEJO DO ALEITAMENTO MATERNO	The study analyzes the actions of nurses in primary care to promote and support breastfeeding, highlighting institutional weaknesses.
Pubmed	NORA, Ana Carolina Almeida de; DIAZ, Kátia Chagas Marques	2024	O ENFERMEIRO NA PROMOÇÃO DO ALEITAMENTO MATERNO E OS BENEFÍCIOS PARA SAÚDE DO BEBÊ.	The study analyzes the role of nurses in promoting breastfeeding and highlights its benefits for mothers and babies.
Brazilian Journals	SANTIAGO, Laura Silva et al.	2024	O papel do enfermeiro na promoção do aleitamento materno.	The study analyzes nurses' practices in promoting breastfeeding, highlighting emotional support, education, and supportive policies.
Scielo	SILVA, Clariana Falcão et al.	2023	Implicações da pandemia da COVID19 no aleitamento materno e na promoção da saúde.	The study analyzes the impacts of COVID-19 on breastfeeding and health promotion actions in primary care.
Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da Usp	SOUZA, Silvana Regina Rossi Kissula et al.	2022	Aleitamento materno em tempos de COVID-19.	The study analyzes the impacts of COVID-19 on breastfeeding, highlighting changes in care, support, practices, and emotional health.

Nursing Education Perspectives	UHR, Stephanie D. et al.	2023	Attitudes Regarding Breastfeeding Education.	The study analyzes the impact of an educational module on breastfeeding on the attitudes of pre-licensure nursing students.
Revista de Pesquisa Cuidado	VIANA, Marina Delli Zotti Souza et al.	2021	Nursing strategies and actions on breastfeeding: integrative review / estratégias e ações do enfermeiro no incentivo ao aleitamento materno.	The study analyzes the impact of nursing strategies and actions in encouraging breastfeeding.
Frontiers Of Nursing	YANG, Yuan-Yuan et al.	2023	Enhancing the role of nurses in breastfeeding preterm infants.	Analyzes barriers and strategies to strengthen the role of nurses in promoting breastfeeding in preterm infants.

Source: Prepared by the authors themselves.

The research also reveals that institutional recognition of the importance of nurses in promoting breastfeeding is a determining factor for the effectiveness of actions. When there is professional appreciation, encouragement for training, and adequate working conditions, the results are more positive, both for clinical practice and for the health outcomes of the maternal and child population. The creation of spaces such as breastfeeding support rooms and breastfeeding- , mothers' groups, and community support networks, when led by trained nurses, further strengthen this process.^{4; 13.}

The presence of nurses in maternity wards with the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative reinforces the institutional commitment to promoting breastfeeding, as these professionals are primarily responsible for implementing the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding.^{4; 13.}

The defense of the rights of breastfeeding women, such as maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks at work, is also part of the ethical and political role of nurses, who act as agents of social change.^{4; 13.}

Scientific research in nursing has contributed to expanding knowledge about effective strategies for promoting breastfeeding, strengthening the theoretical basis that supports the clinical practice of nurses.^{4; 13.}

Finally, the benefits of breastfeeding for maternal and child health were

widely reinforced in the literature consulted. The practice contributes to reducing infant morbidity and mortality rates, preventing chronic diseases in childhood, promoting the emotional development of children, and reducing health risks for women, such as breast and ovarian cancer. In this sense, nurses play a crucial role not only in providing technical guidance but also in protecting this fundamental right, contributing to the strengthening of public health and the construction of a more just and healthy society.^{8; 15.}

Nurses are key players in the consolidation of public policies aimed at women's and children's health, and their role in breastfeeding is a strategic investment in improving health indicators and building a more just and healthy society.^{8; 15.}

Thus, strengthening the role of nurses in encouraging breastfeeding is a powerful and necessary strategy for improving health indicators in the country. Investing in the valorization of these professionals through continuing education, support policies, and decent working conditions is a promising way to ensure that more women feel welcomed and secure in their decision to breastfeed.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that nurses have a significant influence on encouraging and promoting breastfeeding, making

them essential agents in promoting maternal and child health. Through educational actions, technical and emotional support, and continuous monitoring, nurses contribute to strengthening maternal confidence, overcoming breastfeeding difficulties, and maintaining exclusive breastfeeding until the child is six months old, as recommended by national and international health guidelines.

The most effective strategies identified include prenatal guidance, immediate postpartum support, and home follow-up, especially when performed in an empathetic, individualized, and evidence-based manner. However, challenges such as work overload, lack of time during consultations, the need for continuous training, and sociocultural factors still pose obstacles to breastfeeding and the full performance of nurses in this context.^{7; 8.}

It is therefore clear that there is a need to strengthen public health policies that guarantee better working conditions for nursing professionals, promote continuing education in breastfeeding, and ensure that nurses are valued as central figures in the breastfeeding support network. By recognizing breastfeeding as an essential practice for life and nurses as key players in this care, we promote not only the well-being of children and women, but also advances in public health indicators, contributing to the construction of a healthier and more equitable society.^{11; 15.}

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