

The recipe for fighting colon cancer

Love the food that colon cancer hates



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What we eat. Why we eat.

Food, like the air we breathe, is essential for life. But as individuals, we don't all view food the same way. Ask ten people why they eat or what food means to them, and you'll probably get 15 different answers, like:

Because it's important to someone else	Socializing
Enjoyment	Traditions
Insecurity	Appeal (visual, smell)
Availability	Habit
Fatigue	Already paid for the food
Boredom	To get sleep
Curiosity	Comfort
Depression	Anger
Temptation	Nervousness
Time of day	Free!
Did we miss any of the reasons that you eat?	

There are many reasons for eating that have nothing to do with what our bodies need. And if you're thinking this booklet is about dieting, it's not. Even people who choose foods to stay thin or fit may be making bad food choices.

How is that possible? It's because medical science is now drawing more links between food choices and diseases, including cancer. So, no matter *why* you eat, *what* you eat may save your life.

We know that it can be challenging to change your eating habits. That's why we prepared this booklet to provide ideas and information that can help you make better choices. A small substitute of a bad food for a good food is to your benefit. We'll give you a tool you can use to introduce good changes at your own pace.

As an added bonus, think about the fact that all these changes may help prevent other health problems, like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and even other types of cancers.

What the colon does with the food we eat

The colon (also known as the large intestine and large bowel) is the last stop for digesting food before it passes through your rectum and is eliminated. It can take quite a while for the colon to process all the food you eat. When you start your day, your colon may still be processing your meals from yesterday.

Your colon is coated by billions of bacteria, which breaks down the last remnants of whatever food you've consumed. The colon functions to absorb liquids; it also functions to store compressed waste (stool or feces).

Researchers now know that some types of food can irritate the colon, disrupt the delicate balance of healthy bacteria, or bring harmful chemicals (known as carcinogens) into your colon.

These poor conditions can provide the environment for the gene mutation that can become, over time, cancerous growths, as shown in the illustration below.

In other publications in this campaign, *Cancer: Be aware, not afraid*, we've talked about the importance of having a colonoscopy when your healthcare provider recommends it. Early screening can enable a doctor to see and remove benign (non-cancerous) polyps in your colon before they become cancerous as well as malignant polyps.

On a daily basis, you can choose foods that create a healthier environment for your colon. Researchers have identified "helpful and harmful" foods for colon cancer prevention. While researchers don't yet understand all of the links between food and colon cancer, research indicates that a healthy diet can help prevent colorectal cancers.¹

Let's go deeper into the topic of healthy food choices: what kinds of food choices keep the colon working effectively? What kinds of food choices can cause distress and disorder in the colon?

Let's separate food choices from calorie counting

It's important to differentiate between food choices and cutting calories or dieting. In this booklet, we're going to talk primarily about food choices and, to some extent, portions.

Having said that, a sedentary lifestyle and obesity are also contributors to cancer.

- Are you healthier overall if you're active rather than sedentary?
Yes!
- Are you healthier overall if you're not overweight?
Yes!

This is why we've included information about weight loss and exercise. But primarily we're focusing on colon-friendly food choices.

An overview of (good and bad) food choices for colon health

In this awareness series, you may remember the article that covered the foods to eat and those to avoid. In this booklet, we'll explain more about these foods. If there's a category of food that you want to know more about — like fiber — there's a lot of information available online. There are even cookbooks devoted to delicious dishes designed to get more fiber into your meals.

Our goal is to give you a good overview and some tools to help you start making beneficial changes. We encourage you to do more reading on your own.

We also encourage you to review your new food plan with your healthcare provider.

- Limit red meat to less than 18 ounces per week; eliminate processed meats like bacon, sausage and hot dogs (both the content and preparation of these foods may contribute to colon cancer).
- Choose unsaturated fats instead of the saturated fats typically found in animal foods like red meat and butter.
- Try to include more food that contains omega-3 fatty acids, like wild salmon (as opposed to farm-raised salmon), milled flaxseed, walnuts, and plant-based oils, such as olive and canola oils.
- Choose yellow and orange vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin and summer squash, which are high in beta-carotene. Eat a good variety of fruit daily.
- Eat more fiber-rich foods (they may not directly lower your risk of colon cancer, but they can help curb your appetite so you don't overeat).
- Limit your alcohol intake. Alcohol may be smooth going down, but once it's in your digestive tract and liver it's an irritant to cells. The American Cancer Society recommends that people who drink alcohol limit their intake to no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women. The recommended limit is lower for women because of their smaller body size and slower breakdown of alcohol.¹¹



Meat tastes good going in, but it’s tougher making its way out

If meat is a big part of your diet, you may hate being told that eating red meat and, especially, processed meats, can increase your risk of developing colon cancer. You may be saying to yourself, “I’ve eaten meat all my life. I’ve never had a bad reaction to it. How can it be harmful to my colon?”

Colon cancer doesn’t respond to harmful foods the way your taste buds respond to unpleasant foods. Even if meat is irritating the lining (membrane) of your colon, you won’t necessarily feel any discomfort. Poor food choices may give you a recurring constipation problem, but constipation is not necessarily a symptom of colon cancer.

Even if you can’t feel it, the irritation from food and the chemicals in processed meats are doing damage. This damage usually happens over a long period of time. We’re going to tell you why and how meat can create an unhealthy environment that increases risks of colon cancer.

How processed meats damage your colon

“Processed” generally refers to any type of process that preserves meat (to keep it edible longer) or adds some type of flavoring. This includes smoking, curing, fermenting, and salting. Any processing produces cancer-causing chemicals in the meat.

If you want to do some additional research, read more about the chemicals that are used in or produced by meat processing:

- Nitrates/nitrites
- Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)
- Heterocyclic Amines (HCAs)

Eating even a small amount of processed meats on a regular basis increases the risk of colon cancer. Limiting red meat to less than 18 ounces. (cooked) per week and avoiding processed meat are proven ways to lower risk for colorectal cancer.³ For reference, one large hot dog contains about three ounces of meat.

Here are some ideas for foods and flavors you can substitute for processed meats.

Red meat is hard on the planet



If you’re worried about the health of the planet (as well as the health of your colon), eating less red meat will help both. Beef, for example, is very resource-intensive to produce. Compared to eating common plant proteins, such as beans, peas, and lentils, beef:

- requires 20 times more land per gram of edible protein
- emits 20 times more harmful greenhouse gas per gram of edible protein

If you recycle or rideshare to help the environment, think about cutting back your meat consumption, too.

Source: <https://www.wri.org/blog/2018/12/how-sustainably-feed-10-billion-people-2050-21-charts> December, 2018

Instead of processed meats like:

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| • Bacon | • Bologna | • Bratwurst | • Chorizo |
| • Corned beef | • Deli meats | • Ham | • Hot dogs |
| • Jerky | • Pastram | • Pepperoni | • Salami |
| • Sausage | | | |

Choose:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh meats/fish <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fresh chicken or other poultry• Fish• Lean beef*• Pork*• Lamb <p><i>*These choices should be limited to a three-ounce portion daily</i></p> | Use herbs and spices for favoring and marinating fresh meats/fish <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basil• Chili flakes• Garlic• Fennel• Oregano• Pepper• Rosemary• Thyme | Try non-meat and plant-based sources of protein <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Edamane• Cottage cheese• Chickpeas• Egg whites• Fat-free yogurt (add your own fresh fruit)• Hummus• Legumes, especially beans• Parmesan cheese• Tempeh• Tofu• Quinoa |
|---|---|---|

High heat and charred meat

Do you like your meat well done on the inside and charred on the outside? Do you grill your foods on a high heat? Do you like to pan sear meat until it's blackened and shiny on the outside?

Your taste buds may register this preparation as “delicious,” but your colon isn't processing this meal with the same delight.

You should still cook all meats thoroughly. Just cook or grill at lower temperatures and forget the searing and charring. Cook or grill until done, not overdone.

Treat meat as a rare delicacy

You probably don't eat expensive foods like caviar, black truffles or matsutake mushrooms every day. We're just conditioned to think of some things as “special occasion” foods.

Think of meat as a delicacy — something you want to savor in small portions. In fact, you may find that your shopping budget declines pretty substantially as you choose more plant-based proteins over animal proteins. Here's a suggestion: record what you spend on dining out and grocery shopping currently. Check your food expenses again in three months, after you've made the changes in this booklet. You may find some unexpected savings that come with healthier eating.

Fiber keeps things moving in your colon

Fiber is such a great food source, but often overlooked or misunderstood. Fiber is one of those protective ingredients that help with overall health. Eating more fiber is linked with helping weight loss, reducing constipation, improving cholesterol levels (which can lower your risk for heart disease), and maintaining better blood sugar levels (which can lower your risk for developing type 2 diabetes).

Researchers are still working on the exact role that fiber plays in helping to prevent colon cancer. Some benefits may include:

- Reducing the time it takes for food products to move through the digestive system, including the time it sits in your colon. This means that harmful carcinogens and irritants spend less time in contact with the lining of the colon, which may reduce your risk of developing colon cancer.
- When bacteria feed on fiber, it produces a byproduct called short-chain fatty acids. These acids make it difficult for too much bacteria to live in your colon, keeping a healthy balance.⁴

Loving legumes

A legume is a class of vegetables. There are so many varieties (to suit any taste) and they're a wonderful all-around food source:



- Great source of protein (without the problems associated with meats)
- Contain soluble and insoluble fiber
- Low in fat
- Cholesterol-free
- High in nutrients like folate, potassium, iron and magnesium
- Contain the “good” kind of fats

Legumes are so versatile that it's easy to find ways to incorporate them into your meals, including:

- Dips and spreads
- Casseroles
- Chili and stews
- Hummus
- Pasta
- Salad garnish
- Salsa
- Side dishes
- Snacks
- Soups
- Veggie burger

You might be hesitant to add more beans to your diet because you're worried about intestinal gas. Beans contain sugars that our bodies can't break down. Instead the bacteria in the colon ferments these sugars, which produces gas. But there are ways of reducing the problem and helping your body get better at digesting beans.

- Start by eating one bean-based meal a week, then two meals a week, gradually working your way up to more bean-based meals
- Look for tips on cooking beans to make them more digestible by your body
- Try canned beans, which can reduce some of the gas-producing indigestible carbohydrates
- Incorporate whole grains with bean meals
- Avoid eating fruit or sugary foods 2-3 hours before or after eating beans
- Try mung beans, adzuki and dhal, which are easy-to-digest beans

What about the newer plant-based meat substitutes, like the Impossible Burger and the Beyond Burger, which are designed to look, taste and even appear to “bleed” like real meat? Unfortunately, from a health perspective, they are often heavily processed and may be high in unhealthy saturated fat. Depending on the level of processing, food items can lose important nutrients found in plant foods. Although further research is needed, the newer plant-based meat products appear to be acceptably safe to eat in moderation.²

How much fiber should you aim for?

In the U.S., women are advised to eat 21-25 grams of fiber a day, men 30-38 grams.⁴

Start creating your own “fiber favorites” list

A lot of people think that fiber is a tasteless ingredient that you have to add to otherwise delicious food. But fiber is found naturally in a lot of food that you already like. Or you'll like it once you try it.

Here's just a sample of some high-fiber foods from four different categories.⁴ Start adding up grams and you'll see how easy it is to reach the recommended amount of fiber. (Note that fiber content for these foods may vary by brands, varieties and other factors.)

Legumes, nuts, and seeds

- Boiled split peas (1 cup/236.59 ml): 16.3 grams
- Boiled lentils: (1 cup/236.59 ml): 15.6 grams
- Boiled black beans: (1 cup/236.59 ml): 15 grams

Vegetables

- Boiled artichoke (1 medium): 10.3 grams
- Boiled green peas (1 cup/236.59 ml): 8.8 grams
- Boiled broccoli (1 cup/236.59 ml): 5.1 grams

Fruits

- Raspberries (1 cup/236.59 ml): 8 grams
- Pear with skin (1 medium): 5.5 grams
- Apple with skin (1 medium): 4.4 grams

Grains, cereal, and pasta

- Whole wheat cooked spaghetti (1 cup/236.59 ml): 6.3 grams
- Barley, pearled, cooked (1 cup/236.59 ml): 6 grams
- Oat bran muffin (1 medium): 5.2 grams

The more you read about fiber, the more natural sources you'll find that you might like. If you're a fan of squash, for example, it's an especially good source of soluble fiber. This means it digests more slowly, which helps you feel full longer.

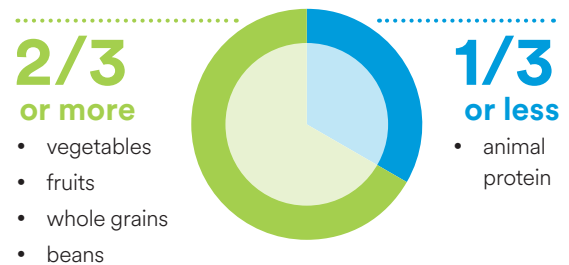
Start a list of Fiber Favorites, beginning with the ones you already like. Try one new fiber source every month. If you like it, incorporate it into your favorites. If you don't, move on to the next one. There are lots to try!

Consider sharing your Fiber Favorites list with co-workers, friends, and family, especially before the next family barbecue or company event.

Important note: Don't try to go from eating a small amount of fiber to a fiber-rich diet in a short period of time. You may end up feeling gassy and bloated. Your body will need time to adjust to a high-fiber diet.

Balancing your food with the plate method

The plate method is a fairly simple way of balancing your food consumption. For colon health, the recommendation is to fill your plate with two-thirds vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans, and one-third animal protein.⁶



If the animal protein is a red meat, make sure to eat no more than 3 ounces per day.

If you can substitute a plant-based protein for an animal protein a few times a week, even better! As you'll read more than once in this booklet, plant-based proteins offer nutrition benefits beyond protein. They're easier on your digestive system. They're easier on your budget. And getting them to your table requires less from the planet's limited resources.

Meat portions and meal planning

Planning is always helpful: it avoids mindless eating and bad judgment when you're in a rush.

If you're standing in line at the cafeteria ordering your lunch, use this guideline to help you with portion control: a three ounce serving of meat is about the size of a deck of cards. If the portion looks bigger than that, ask the server to cut it down to a smaller size and give you a bigger portion of vegetables.

If you have a choice between processed meats and fresh baked fish or poultry, choose fresh.

If you have less control over what you eat for lunch, then make that your meat meal. If you can experiment with new foods at dinner, that's probably the best meal to try a new type of protein. Perhaps alternate between animal and plant-based proteins. Over time, try to incorporate more plant-based proteins into your diet.

Obesity and colon cancer

Obesity is defined as an unhealthy amount of fat or the distribution of fat (usually fat around the belly or waist). Researchers use a scale known as the body mass index (BMI), which takes into account more than just your weight.



A higher BMI is associated with increased risk of colon and rectal cancers in both men and in women, but the increases are higher in men than in women. People who are obese are about 30% more likely to develop colorectal cancer than normal-weight people.

The food recommendations in this booklet aren't focused on weight loss. But if you follow these recommendations, you may find that you lose weight. Adding more fiber to your diet and drinking more water, for example, may help you feel fuller, so you eat less. If you follow the recommendations on regular exercising, you may burn off excess calories that would otherwise be stored as fat in your body. Remember to consult your healthcare provider about your meal and exercise plans.

Source: National Cancer Institute <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/obesity/obesity-fact-sheet>, January 2017

Play with your food: try new dishes and recipes

Try new recipes, new restaurants, and new ways of preparing the foods you already like. For example:

- Heating vegetables doesn't create hazardous chemicals during high-temperature cooking. Try an all-vegetable kebab for your barbecues.
- Perhaps substitute fish for meat (and pick a fish high in omega-3 fatty acids).
- Replace sausage in chili and stews with beans like kidney beans, chickpeas, and lentils.

Fats that your colon really likes

There are different types of fat. Your body produces fat by storing calories that you don't need for energy. You gain weight when you can't use or burn off these excess calories with enough activity.

You also consume fats when you eat: saturated fats, trans fats, unsaturated fats, and omega-3 fatty acids.

Saturated fats

Saturated fats are usually solid at room temperature; these include beef fat, pork fat, butter, shortening, and stick margarine. In general, it's better to limit saturated fats in your diet, especially fat rendered from meat. Saturated fats can increase the low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or unhealthy/bad cholesterol in your body.¹²

Trans fats

Trans fats are generally considered the worst kind of fat. Like saturated fats, they are also solid at room temperature. This is a type of fat that occurs naturally in some foods in small amounts. But most trans fats are made from oils through a food processing method called partial hydrogenation. These partially hydrogenated trans fats can increase unhealthy LDL cholesterol and lower healthy high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. This hidden trans fat can add up quickly. When you check the food label for trans fat, also check the food's ingredient list for partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. In the United States, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has also specifically ruled that trans fats are not generally recognized as safe and can no longer be added to food.¹³

Unsaturated fats

Unsaturated fats are usually liquid at room temperature, such as olive, canola, safflower, peanut, and corn oils. There are two types of unsaturated fats: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Both types are associated with helping to improve blood cholesterol levels. And monounsaturated fat also helps regulate insulin levels and control blood sugars.¹⁴

Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are found in many types of fish, including wild caught salmon (wild caught salmon has more omega-3s than farmed), anchovies, bluefish, herring, mackerel, sardines, sturgeon, tuna, and trout.

Omega-3 fatty acids (a different type than the one found in fish) are also in ground or milled flaxseed, nuts and seeds (walnuts, butternuts, and sunflower), and plant-based oils (canola, flaxseed, and soybean).

While "fatty acids" sounds like something you wouldn't want in your body, the opposite is true: omega-3 fatty acids help lower blood cholesterol levels. They have also been linked to a decrease in colon cancer risk.⁵

When preparing fish, remember it's still a protein, so limit your portion to about four to six ounces per serving. It's healthier to bake or broil seafood rather than frying in oil (even if it's a healthy oil).

Look at how good orange and yellow vegetables are

Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables: that's often a top recommendation for prevention of many diseases.⁶ One reason is antioxidants, which are good chemicals that neutralize bad chemicals (called free radicals) that cause cell damage.

Vegetables come in so many colors (green, red, orange, yellow, brown, white). The general rule is to choose a variety of colors to give you a variety of nutrients and antioxidants.

These vegetables are high in beta-carotene and vitamin B6, both of which are thought to have strong anti-cancer characteristics.

The following is a list of some yellow and orange vegetables. You can see how easy it would be to add them to salads or sandwiches, use them in casseroles, and cook them up for a side dish.

- Carrots
- Sweet potatoes
- Pumpkin
- Butternut, acorn, and summer squash
- Corn
- Orange and yellow peppers
- Yellow beets

Hydrate (but not with alcohol)

Alcohol use has been linked with a higher risk of cancers of the colon and rectum:¹¹

- Remember that friendly bacteria in your colon that helps break down food? Some researchers believe that the bacteria can convert alcohol into a cancer-causing chemical called acetaldehyde.¹¹
- Alcohol may also affect the body's ability to absorb nutrients like folate, which your body needs to maintain cell health.¹¹

The American Cancer Society recommends that men limit their intake to no more than 2 drinks per day and women to 1 drink per day. A drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1½ ounces of hard liquor.⁷

In terms of cancer risk, it's the amount of alcohol you drink, not the type. Water, on the other hand, is great for your digestive system. Water may help dilute toxic chemicals. It can help your colon move stool more quickly, so that carcinogens spend less time in contact with the lining of the colon.



Make your own schedule for change

Sometimes change is exciting. Sometimes it's hard. We've developed a tool that can help you plan and make food changes as gradually as you prefer. First, we've put together a group of food and meal changes, such as:

- Try two new fruits this week
- Try the plate method for balancing your food choices
- Each day, pick one meal for your three ounces of red meat

Make a list of all the processed foods you like; cross off all but your three favorites	Replace one of your favorite processed foods with a fresh meat option for your protein	Try a new source of fiber; if you like it, add it to your list of "fiber favorites"
Grill meat at a lower temperature; don't make your steak well done	Drink eight ounces of water with every meal where you've added fiber	Try a new recipe, cafeteria or restaurant choice without meat
Try the plate method for balancing your food choices	Each day, pick one meal for your three ounces of red meat (beef, pork, lamb)	Choose other proteins for all meals (except the meal where you have three ounces of meat)
Prepare a bean dish (or add beans to salad) instead of meat	Identify one unsaturated fat to replace a saturated fat you usually use	Include yellow and orange vegetables in one meal
Eat three fresh fruits (unsweetened canned or frozen) three times per day	Try two new fruits this week (to increase your variety)	Try a smoothie or salad for your fruits or vegetables or fiber
Limit your alcohol to one glass of beer or wine per day (two for men)	Try a new spice or herb for flavoring or marinated fresh meats and fish	Add foods with omega-3 fatty acids to three meals

Each week, pick at least one change from the list. Put it in your calendar (even pick the day you want to start). Make changes gradually. But once you've made a change, think of it as permanent.

Following is a sample calendar for a six-week period that includes some of the changes above. This shows how you can make a gradual transition to healthier eating. Try using this calendar or create one that works better for you.

My calendar (sample)

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1	List favorite processed foods; reduce list to my three favorites	Pick one meal every day for my three ounces of fresh meat			Try the plate method at lunch or dinner		
Week 2		Replace one of my favorite processed foods with a fresh meat option		Try one new source of fiber; add the ones I like to my "fiber favorites" list		Drink eight ounces of water with every meal that has fiber	
Week 3	Replace the second favorite processed foods with a fresh meat option		Try two new fruits this week				
Week 4		Eat three fresh fruits three times per day				Replace the third (and last) favorite processed foods with a fresh meat option	
Week 5	Include yellow and orange vegetables in three meals this week			Try a new recipe, cafeteria or restaurant choice without meat			
Week 6	Limit my daily alcohol intake all week		Add a smoothie or salad with fruits, fiber, vegetables three times this week				

Food excuses. Or what to say when you don't want to be rude

Sometimes when you change food choices, it can make other people unhappy. Friends and co-workers may tease you. Relatives may defend traditions around food and pressure you to eat what's customary.

So prepare yourself for well-intentioned pressure. Here are a few tips:

Direct and honest

- "There's a strong link between developing colon cancer and eating too much red meat and processed meat. I was eating a lot more than they recommend, so I'm cutting back."
- "There's colon cancer in my family. I found out changing my diet can help reduce my risk of developing the disease. I'm doing this for myself and my family."

Polite excuse

- "I made a promise to myself to get more variety in my diet. I was getting tired of eating the same things all the time."
- "The price of meat is just too expensive! I'm learning to love vegetables."
- "I'm having a little stomach trouble. I'm going to stick with something lighter."

A final word: exercise plays an active part in cancer prevention

According to the American Cancer Society, increasing your level of activity lowers your risk of colorectal cancer and polyps.⁸

Some studies have reported that adults who increase their physical activity in intensity, duration, or frequency can reduce their risk of developing colon cancer by 30 to 40 percent, compared to adults who are sedentary.⁹

The latest recommendations on exercise for adults is at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity each week (preferably spread out throughout the week).¹⁰

For example, think in terms of getting 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day, five times a week. If you don't have time to do 30 minutes on some days, break your exercise into two or three segments of ten to 15 minutes per day.

A simple way to judge whether you're in the moderate zone is whether or not you're breathing hard (like you would if you were walking briskly). You should be able to carry on a slightly breathless conversation with a friend. But you shouldn't be able to sing a song and hold notes (which requires steady breathing).

Just remember to give yourself a few minutes to warm up and work up to that moderate level. And don't forget that gentle stretching is important for your muscles. Aside from planned exercise, any small amount of physical activity helps. For example, make it a habit to use the stairs instead of the elevator at work.

If you haven't exercised consistently before, be sure to work up to this daily pace gradually. Be sure to review your exercise program with your healthcare provider. For example, if your blood glucose levels are not yet well controlled, your doctor may want you to avoid certain kinds of workouts.

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