



VITALITY
RENEWAL
Functional Medicine



FROM FATIGUED TO FABULOUS

FIVE KEYS TO UNLOCK YOUR ENERGY
AND FEEL LIKE YOURSELF AGAIN

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THE HORMONE LOCKSMITH

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ARE YOU RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Are you surviving on caffeine and willpower?

Do you feel like you barely have enough energy to get through your day — and then have nothing left for the people you love by the time evening rolls around?

If so, I want you to know something before we go any further: this is not a character flaw. This is not weakness. And it is not "just stress." I know, because I lived it.

I'm Dr. Yvonne Karney — physician, mother, and for a period of my life, a woman who was running completely empty while doing everything she was supposed to be doing right.

I'll never forget that Christmas night. I was climbing the stairs to tuck my boys in when I heard a thud and then crying. My four-year-old had bumped his lip on the bed frame. A small thing. The kind of thing that happens a hundred times in childhood.

But I had nothing left. Not one reserve of patience or softness. I snapped at him.

He looked up at me and said, "I'm sorry, Mommy."

He apologized to me. For hurting himself.

I sat with him until he fell asleep, and then I sat alone and thought: This is not who I am. I had spent years caring for patients, for my family, for everyone around me — and somewhere in the middle of all of it, I had disappeared. I was so tired that I couldn't find my way back to myself.

That night was a turning point.

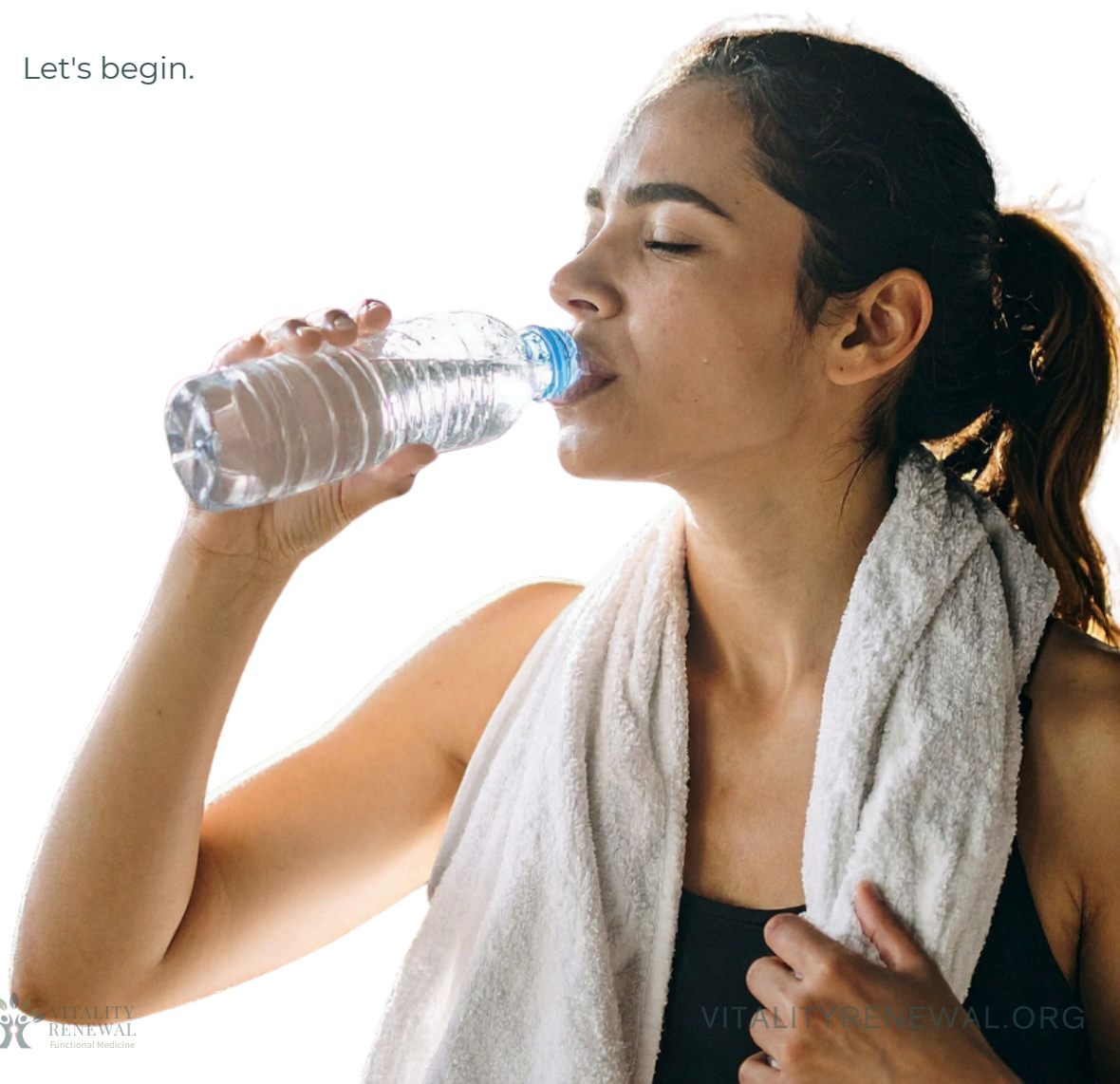
What followed were several episodes of vertigo — one severe enough that I ended up in the ER, certain something was seriously wrong. Eventually, I had to close part of my medical practice. I simply could not keep up.

I had to find answers. This could not be normal. I went looking. Thousands of hours of research. Functional medicine training. Pattern after pattern emerging in my own labs, my own history, and in the stories of the women sitting across from me in the exam room.

What I found changed everything — for me, and for my patients. That research became The UNLOCK Method: a six-key framework for identifying and addressing the root causes of fatigue so that women can reclaim their energy, their clarity, and themselves.

This book gives you five of those six keys — one strategy from each letter of UNLOCK. Each one can make a meaningful difference. Together, they are transformative.

Let's begin.



U

UNCOVER THE ROOT CAUSE — TEST, DON'T GUESS

Knowledge is power. If you can measure it, you can improve it.

The standard approach to lab testing in conventional medicine is grossly inadequate for someone trying to actually feel well. Think about what you get at a typical physical: a basic blood count, a cholesterol panel, a kidney and liver screen, a blood sugar check, and one thyroid marker. That's it. Nothing about inflammation. Nothing about immune function. Nothing about the micronutrients your cells need to make energy.

Those baseline tests are designed to rule out disease — not to help you thrive. There is a significant difference between those two goals.

The screening I use for every patient includes:

- Micronutrients
- Inflammation markers
- Immune system markers (early signs of immune dysfunction)
- A full thyroid panel (six tests, not one)
- Blood sugar and metabolic markers: glucose, A1C, fasting insulin, and when indicated, a two-hour challenge
- Sex hormones
- Cardiovascular and cholesterol markers

The second problem is how labs are interpreted. If you have ever told a doctor you feel terrible and been told “Your labs are normal,” here’s what that actually means.

“Normal” is a statistical construct. Lab companies set the normal range to capture 90 percent of the population — meaning the bottom 5 percent and top 5 percent are flagged as abnormal. Everyone else is “normal.”

Do you honestly believe that 9 out of 10 people are thriving? I don't. And I wouldn't want to measure my health against that standard.

What we are aiming for is not “normal.” We are aiming for optimal. The difference between normal and optimal is the same as the difference between not having an identifiable disease and actually feeling well. Those are not the same thing.



KEY #1 FOR UNLOCKING YOUR ENERGY:

STOP SETTLING FOR “NORMAL.” DEMAND OPTIMAL



This principle applies especially to thyroid function, which I want to address specifically because it is the most commonly missed driver of fatigue I see in clinical practice.

Thyroid hormone is what turns on the lights in every cell in your body. It drives energy production at the cellular level. Every single cell needs it, which is unusual for a hormone. When thyroid function is suboptimal — even within the so-called normal range — you feel it.

Conventional medicine trains physicians to check only TSH. TSH is not thyroid hormone — it is a regulatory signal from your brain indicating that the body is asking for more hormone. Stress, trauma, toxins, and nutritional deficiencies can all interfere with this signal, making TSH an unreliable standalone indicator.

A complete thyroid evaluation includes:

- TSH
- Free T4
- Free T3
- Reverse T3
- Thyroid antibodies (both thyroglobulin and thyroid peroxidase)

If you are struggling with fatigue, take this list to your physician and request a full panel. If they refuse, it may be time to find a provider who will work with you rather than around you.

N

NOURISH YOUR BODY'S HEALING POTENTIAL

Your body has an extraordinary capacity to heal — but it can only do that if you give it the raw materials it needs. Nourishment is not simply about calories. It is about building blocks: the fats, proteins, and nutrients your cells rely on to generate energy, repair tissue, and regulate hormones.

Two of the most important — and most misunderstood — nutritional strategies for energy are gut repair and healthy fats.

Let's cover both.

Start With the Gut

Energy begins in the gut. You have to absorb nutrients to make energy, and you have to eliminate toxins and waste efficiently — otherwise they recirculate and create inflammation. A healthy gut is a quiet one. You shouldn't be constantly aware of your digestive system.

When the gut is unhealthy, it becomes a significant driver of inflammation — and inflammation is one of the primary robbers of energy. Leaky gut, known clinically as intestinal hyperpermeability, also increases the risk of autoimmune conditions.

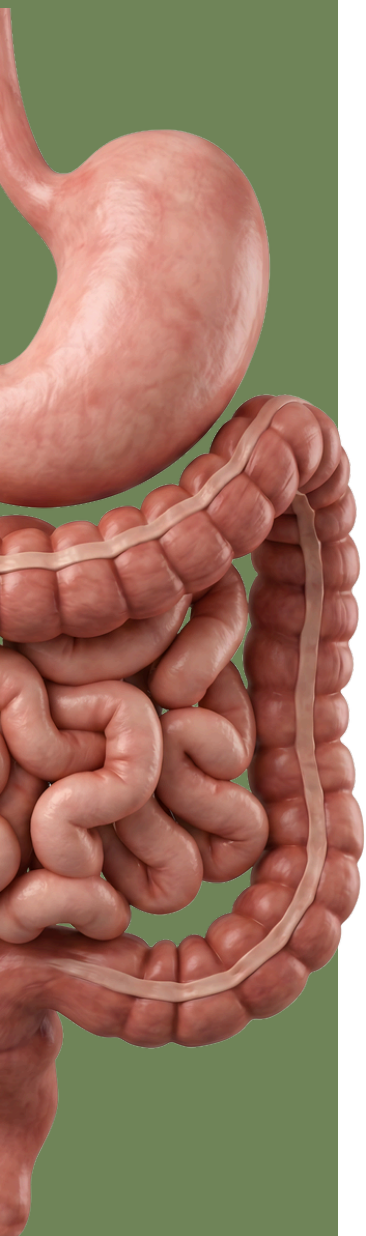
The single most impactful thing you can do for gut health is eliminate foods that cause inflammation. Some foods are inflammatory for virtually everyone. Others are inflammatory only for certain individuals.

Foods that are inflammatory for most people:

- Added sugar
- Processed and ultra-processed foods
- Chemical additives — preservatives, artificial colorings, artificial sweeteners
- Excess alcohol
- Trans-fats (partially hydrogenated oils)

Foods that are inflammatory for many people:

- Dairy
- Grains (wheat, rye, barley, oats, rice)
- Corn
- Soy



To determine which of these affect you personally, you need to eliminate all of them for at least seven days — ideally thirty — and then reintroduce them one at a time, paying close attention to how your body responds. This is an elimination diet.

Eliminating one food at a time does not work. If you are sensitive to five things and remove only two, you are unlikely to feel meaningfully better. Think of it like walking around with five pebbles in your shoe. Removing two still leaves three pebbles causing pain.

Add Healthy Fat

Your brain is approximately 60 percent fat. Your mitochondria — the energy-producing organelles inside every cell — make energy within a lipid membrane. Fat is not the enemy. The wrong kinds of fat are.

Most of the fat in the standard American diet is damaged. Industrial processing of polyunsaturated fats like omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids causes oxidation. Oxidized fats are rancid and cannot support healthy mitochondrial function. They interfere with your cells' ability to produce energy.

Good sources of healthy fats:

- Raw, organic nuts and seeds (sunflower and pumpkin seeds are particularly good)
- Avocados
- Coconut
- Egg yolks from pastured chickens (slightly runny to preserve the fat integrity)
- Meat from pasture-raised animals
- Dairy from grass-fed cows, if you tolerate dairy
- Caviar

Avoid trans-fats entirely. They do not exist in nature and must be manufactured in a lab. On ingredient labels, they appear as “partially hydrogenated.”

KEY #2 FOR UNLOCKING YOUR ENERGY:

**HEAL THE GUT,
FEED THE MITOCHONDRIA.**

L

LOWER YOUR TOXIC BURDEN

We live in an era of unprecedented toxic exposure. The rise in autoimmune disease and cancer is not random. I believe it is directly tied to cumulative toxic burden — the steady accumulation of chemicals, heavy metals, mold toxins, and environmental contaminants that our bodies were never designed to handle at this volume.

Toxins drive inflammation. They damage cell membranes and disrupt mitochondrial function. They deplete the very nutrients your detoxification pathways depend on. And they are everywhere.

The goal is not perfection. You cannot control what your neighbors do, where cell towers are located, or what the city sprays. But you can control a significant portion of your daily exposure — what you eat, what you put on your skin, what you clean your home with, and what you breathe indoors.

Think of it this way: over the course of any given month, your goal is to eliminate more toxins than you take in. That is achievable.

Reduce Toxins Through Food

Common food-based toxin sources include:

- Preservatives, artificial colorings, and artificial flavorings in processed foods
- Pesticide and herbicide residues on produce
- BPA and other plasticizers from canned goods
- Mycotoxins (mold toxins) commonly found in grains

The easiest way to avoid the first category is to cook from whole ingredients and read every label before purchasing. If you cannot pronounce an ingredient, it is probably a chemical.

For produce, two practical steps make a real difference:

1. **Wash your produce with more than water.** Pesticide residues are fat-soluble and will not rinse off with plain water. Add a few drops of clear, unscented dish soap to a basin of water, soak your produce for a few minutes, and rinse thoroughly. Vegetable wash products are also available if you prefer a ready-made option.
2. **Use the Environmental Working Group's annual Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen guides (ewg.org) to prioritize which produce to buy organic.** For anything on the Dirty Dozen list, buy organic or avoid it. For items on the Clean Fifteen, conventional is a reasonable choice.

Reduce Toxins in Your Home

Personal care products are a significant and frequently overlooked source of daily chemical exposure. The skin absorbs what you put on it. Conventional cosmetics, lotions, shampoos, and cleaning products often contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals that directly interfere with hormone function.

Check your personal care products using the EWG's Skin Deep database at ewg.org. Aim for products rated 1–2 on their hazard scale.

Also consider indoor air quality. Mold is one of the most underrecognized drivers of chronic fatigue and hormonal disruption I see in my patients. If you have a history of water damage in your home, or if you notice musty odors, visible mold, or persistent symptoms that improve when you travel, environmental mycotoxin exposure should be on your radar.

**KEY #3 FOR UNLOCKING YOUR ENERGY:
REDUCE THE TOXIC LOAD THAT IS
DEPLETING YOUR CELLS.**

O

OPTIMIZE YOUR HORMONES

Hormones are the communication network of your body. They tell every organ system what to do, when to do it, and how much energy to use. When that communication breaks down — even subtly — the effects ripple across every aspect of how you feel.

Most women who come to me have already had their hormones “checked” and been told everything looks fine. What they haven’t been told is that “fine” and “optimal” are not the same thing. A result can fall within the reference range while still being far below the level at which your body functions well.

Hormonal optimization is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. It requires comprehensive testing, interpretation using optimal rather than statistical ranges, and individualized treatment. That is exactly what we do in the UNLOCK Method™ program.

That said, there are foundational hormonal principles that apply to virtually every woman dealing with chronic fatigue.

Cortisol and the Adrenal Connection

Cortisol is your primary stress hormone. It regulates your energy, your immune response, your blood sugar, and your sleep-wake cycle. Chronic stress, poor sleep, and relentless demands on the body push the adrenal glands to produce more cortisol over time — and eventually, they simply cannot keep up.

The result is a pattern called HPA axis dysregulation — sometimes loosely called “adrenal fatigue,” though that term is imprecise. You may experience fatigue that is worst in the morning, a mid-afternoon crash, difficulty falling or staying asleep, and an inability to recover from even mild physical or emotional stress.

Supporting adrenal function begins with the basics: consistent sleep, adequate protein, blood sugar stability, stress reduction, and reducing inflammatory inputs. From there, targeted nutritional support and, when appropriate, bioidentical hormone therapy can make a significant difference.

Sex Hormones and Energy

Estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone all contribute to energy in ways that most people do not realize. Low progesterone disrupts sleep. Low estrogen affects mood, cognition, and mitochondrial efficiency. Low testosterone — which affects women as well as men — reduces drive, stamina, and muscle mass.

Perimenopause and menopause dramatically shift the hormonal landscape, and many women experience fatigue during this transition as a direct consequence of that shift rather than simply aging. Symptoms are late indicators of dysfunction — by the time you feel significant fatigue, the hormonal imbalance has often been building for some time.

A comprehensive sex hormone panel — including free and total estradiol, progesterone, total and free testosterone, DHEA-S, and SHBG — gives the full picture. Interpretation matters as much as testing.

KEY #4 FOR UNLOCKING YOUR ENERGY:

**OPTIMIZE YOUR HORMONE
LEVELS, NOT JUST
YOUR LAB RANGES.**



C

CALM THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

This is one of the most overlooked pieces of the fatigue puzzle — and one of the most powerful.

Your nervous system operates in two primary modes. The sympathetic nervous system governs the fight-or-flight response: it mobilizes energy for survival. The parasympathetic nervous system governs rest, digestion, and repair. You cannot be fully in both at once.

For most women with chronic fatigue, the sympathetic nervous system has become the default. The body is stuck in a low-grade state of alarm, constantly scanning for threats and diverting resources away from healing. In this state, digestion is impaired, hormones are disrupted, sleep quality degrades, and energy production suffers.

Healing requires the parasympathetic state. The question is how to get there — consistently, reliably, and without relying on willpower.

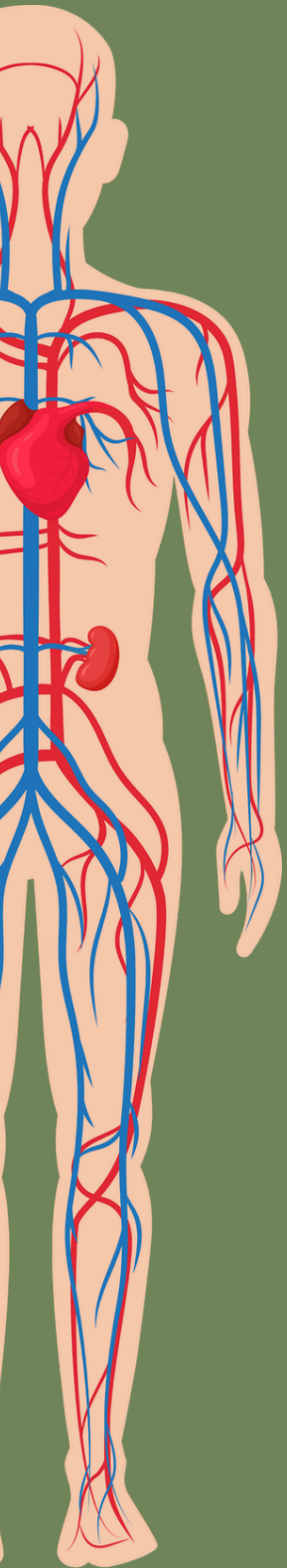
Start With Your Breath

Deep, intentional breathing is one of the most direct pathways to parasympathetic activation. It works by stimulating the vagus nerve, the primary nerve of the parasympathetic system. This is not a soft wellness concept — it is measurable physiology.

Box breathing is a simple technique you can use anywhere, anytime:

1. Sit comfortably and straighten your spine.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for four counts.
3. Hold at the top for four counts.
4. Exhale slowly for four counts.
5. Wait four counts before inhaling again.

Do five to ten rounds, at least once a day. Many of my patients do this at red lights, before meals, or as the first thing they do in the morning. It takes less than two minutes and the cumulative effect on nervous system regulation is significant.



Address the Deeper Patterns

Sometimes calming the nervous system requires more than breathing exercises. Unresolved emotional stress, trauma, and deeply ingrained stress-response patterns can override even the best lifestyle interventions.

In my practice, I use neurofeedback as a powerful tool for identifying and reshaping unhealthy brainwave patterns. It starts with a brain map (EEG) to identify what is happening neurologically, and then uses guided training sessions — at home and in-office — to help the brain build new patterns. This is neuroplasticity in action.

I also believe that getting clear on your WHY matters deeply. Why do you want your energy back? Why do you want to feel well? When you can answer that question from a place of genuine conviction, it fuels the consistency that real healing requires.

KEY #5 FOR UNLOCKING YOUR ENERGY:

**TRAIN YOUR NERVOUS
SYSTEM TOWARD
REST AND REPAIR.**





SO NOW YOU KNOW... WHAT'S NEXT?

These five keys are a powerful starting point. They represent real, evidence-informed strategies that consistently move the needle for women dealing with chronic fatigue, hormonal imbalance, and the sense that they have lost themselves somewhere along the way.

But this is a starting point — not the whole picture.

The UNLOCK Method™ is a complete six-module, six-month program that takes you systematically through every key: Uncover, Nourish, Lower Toxic Burden, Optimize, Calm, and Keep the Momentum Going. That sixth key — the K — is where we shift from solving problems to building a long-term foundation for vitality. It is the bridge to longevity medicine, and it is where many of my patients experience their most meaningful transformation.

The program includes video presentations, educational resources, and guided support delivered in a structured sequence that builds on itself. It is designed for the woman who is done accepting exhaustion as her normal.

If you are ready to go deeper, I invite you to explore what working together looks like. Reach out through my website and we can have a conversation to see if the program is the right fit for where you are.

You did not get here overnight. Healing takes time. But it is absolutely possible — and you do not have to figure it out alone.

To your renewed vitality,

Yvonne Karney, MD
The Hormone Locksmith
Vitality Renewal Functional Medicine

ABOUT YVONNE KARNEY, MD

I would rather be talking about you — but you deserve to know who has been guiding you through these pages.

I have practiced medicine for over 25 years, beginning in obstetrics and gynecology and now practicing exclusively in functional medicine at Vitality Renewal in Crystal Lake, Illinois. My approach is rooted in one principle: find and address the root causes of illness, not just manage symptoms.

Beyond medical school and residency, I have invested thousands of hours in advanced training — bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, thyroid optimization, metabolic medicine, genomics, peptide therapy, detoxification, and neurofeedback. The common thread through all of it is inflammation: identifying it, understanding its sources, and eliminating it so the body can do what it was designed to do.

What makes my position distinctive is that I can bring the full toolkit of functional medicine while also prescribing medication when it is genuinely indicated — always at the lowest effective dose, for the shortest necessary time.

Women hold a particular place in my heart because I know this experience from the inside. We put ourselves last. We hold everything and everyone together while running on fumes. My mission is to help you change that — not just so you feel better, but so you can show up whole for the life and the people that matter most to you.

You are not broken. You are not simply aging. You are a woman whose body has been carrying too much, for too long, without the right support.

That is fixable. And I would be honored to help.



READY TO FIND YOUR ROOT CAUSE?

If what you've read resonates — if you're tired of being told your labs are normal when you know something is wrong — the next step is a conversation.

Our Patient Concierge will take time to understand where you are, what you've already tried, and whether Vitality Renewal is the right fit for you. There's no pressure and no obligation. Just answers.



Find me at @YvonneKarneyMD on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, or visit vitalityrenewal.org to learn more.

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