



Provided by:

**Itty Bitty Orphan Kitty Rescue
Pre-Wean Kitten Project**

Website: www.ibokrescue.org

Email: mentor@ibokrescue.org

P.O. Box 321232, Campbell, CA 95032

(408) 414-3204

Is This an Orphan Kitten?

Keeping the family together during kitten season

After reading this article, if you believe that you've found an orphaned kitten, please read our article "Raising Orphan Kittens" for care instructions.

March to November is kitten season, the time of the year when most kittens are born and shelters are busiest with incoming cats and kittens. Reports of people finding orphaned kittens increase during this time. If you've found an orphan kitten, preserving its health is a difficult job requiring prompt action. However, right up front, take a moment to decide if the kitten or litter you've located has truly been orphaned. Sometimes well-meaning people unknowingly separate kittens from their mother, making things worse instead of better. This article will help you determine if you're dealing with an orphan situation.

WHERE'S MOM?

The mother cat usually remains continuously with newborn kittens for one or two days after giving birth. She may then leave the 'nest' for short periods. Even well cared-for domestic mother cats with litters indoors may leave the nest for several hours at a time about two weeks after giving birth. Feral mothers, needing to hunt for food, will leave the nest for intervals at a much earlier stage.

Also, a mother cat will often pick up and move her litter to a new location, especially during the first few weeks after birth. Establishing a new nest is part of the cat's instinctual behavior to safeguard her young by not remaining in one place too long.

WHAT TO DO?

When you find small kittens without a mother cat present, the mother may simply be away hunting for food or may be moving the kittens, one-by-one, to or from the place you found them. In other words, don't immediately assume the kittens are orphans. If the kittens are safe for the time being, you should observe the nest to see that the mother returns soon and observe quietly from a safe distance if dealing with a shy or feral mother.

The goal here is to do what is best for the mother and her litter -- and it is best to keep a mother together with her kittens if possible, not for emotional reasons, but for the best chance of survival. Not only is hand-raising a young, "pre-wean" kitten an intensive round-the-clock job, but also the mortality rate for these young kittens separated from their mothers is much higher than if they had been kept together.

Remember that if you encounter a lone kitten, mom may be moving the kittens, and the lone kitten could be either the first to be moved to the new location, or the last to be moved from the old.

The same considerations apply to a lone mother cat. For instance, when trapping feral cats, if you trap a nursing mother you must try to find her kittens. In fact if you are trying to trap a feral litter and their mother, you can rely on the mother returning to the nest in order to trap her with her kittens, allowing you to keep the mother and kittens safely together.

In a home situation, kittens should not be taken from the mother until they are 8 to 10 weeks of age. However, kittens born to feral mothers should be taken away, if possible, at about 4 weeks old. At this age, it is easy to tame them and they have gotten 4 weeks' worth of the precious antibodies mother's milk provides. As they get older, it gets increasingly harder to tame them; kittens over the age of 8 weeks who have had no human contact will probably take months to tame...if it can be done at all.

When observing kittens you've found, there is no set length of time that you should wait to watch for a returning mother cat, but think in terms of only a few hours. If the kittens are clean, plump, and sleeping quietly in a heap, chances are that they've got an attentive mom and should be left alone. Abandoned kittens will often be dirty and the nest will be soiled, and they will cry continuously because they're hungry. It's a tough call, especially if you don't know how long the kittens have been alone when you discover them. If you wait too long, the kittens can weaken beyond recovery (chilling and dehydration are major concerns).

By all means, if you've found an orphaned litter we want you to be able to help these kittens reach a happy, healthy adulthood. But before acting, consider the information above and take a moment to ask yourself: "**Are these kittens orphans?**"

For tips on how to find a good home for your kittens on your own, please read "Finding A Good Home For Your Found Kitten" or contact the Itty Bitty Orphan Kitty Pre-Wean Kitten Project mentoring committee at mentor@ibokrescue.org.

Raising Orphan Kittens

A kitten may need hand raising because the mother has died, become ill, rejected the kittens or abandoned them. In the case of feral (wild) cats, the kittens may have been separated from the mother for taming.

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If you have an un-weaned (too young to eat solid food) kitten that must be bottle fed, you must be prepared to devote considerable energy and constant care if the kitten is to have a good chance at survival. The younger the kitten, the more fragile it is. Very young kittens under two weeks of age may not survive without a mother no matter how good the care, *but don't give up!*

WARMTH AND FIRST AID

As soon as you find an orphaned kitten, it must be protected from becoming chilled. Immediately place it under your clothes next to your skin. Most of the young kitten's energy is needed for growth and crying for more food, so there's not a lot left over for heat generation. Normally the mother cat and littermates would provide a good deal of warmth. During their first week, kittens should be kept between 88° and 92° degrees. For the next two weeks they still need temperatures of 80° degrees or so. When they reach five weeks or so they can tolerate a lower room temperature.

If possible, take the kitten to a veterinarian to be checked for dehydration and general condition. If the kitten's skin on the back of their neck stands up when gently pinched, your kitten is dehydrated. Kittens can become dehydrated very quickly without their mother and may need subcutaneous fluids injected under the skin to hydrate them. Kittens that have become dehydrated will have very little energy or appetite, so this is important to take care of *immediately*. Stools should be checked for worms and parasites. Most veterinarian offices can provide advice on hand-raising kittens as well as help with necessary supplies, so please don't skip this step.

When you get the kitten home you must continue to provide warmth. Find a place in your home that is warm, draft-free and isolated from other pets and provide them with a soft blanket and a snuggle safe heating disk or a heating pad turned on low under the blanket so they don't become chilled. *Never feed a chilled kitten!* Always warm them up before feeding.

FEEDING

Do NOT use cow's milk to feed your kitten! Kittens must have a kitten formula like KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer), which can be purchased from a pet supply store. Feeding can be done with a nursing bottle, an eyedropper, or a syringe. **Be careful not to force feed the kitten.** Let the kitten suck the fluid at its own pace, otherwise you can accidentally fill the kitten's lungs with formula and cause aspiration pneumonia.

If the kitten is old enough to suckle, the bottle method is best. *Make sure to never squeeze the bottle!* Also, make sure to clean and sterilize all utensils before each feeding.

To feed your kitten, place it stomach down on a towel or other textured surface to which it can cling. Open its mouth gently with the tip of your finger, and then slip the nipple between its jaws. To prevent air from entering the kitten's stomach, hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle, keeping a light pull on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking.

If a suckling kitten gets formula into its lungs, *immediately* hold the kitten upside down until the choking stops and the airway is cleared. If the kitten is not strong enough to suckle, seek veterinary assistance immediately.

Formula should be warmed to body temperature and fed to very young kittens every 3-4 hours. As they get older every 6-8 hours should be enough. A kitten needs approximately 8 cc's of formula per ounce of body weight per day. The kitten's age determines the number of daily feedings it should receive.

When a kitten has had enough formula, it will stop suckling and its tummy will be rounded. After each meal, burp the kitten by holding it upright against your shoulder and patting its back lightly.

Do not overfeed kittens! Overfeeding can bring on diarrhea as well as cause other health problems.

FEEDING GUIDE

AGE IN WEEKS	AVG. WEIGHT OF KITTENS	AMOUNT OF FORMULA PER DAY	NUMBER OF FEEDINGS PER DAY
1	4 ounces	32 cc	6
2	7 ounces	56 cc	5
3	10 ounces	80 cc	4
4	13 ounces	104 cc	4
5	1 pound	128 cc	3

For kittens with a lack of appetite or anemia (very pale gums and foot pads), Nutri-Cal, a vitamin/mineral supplement available at pet food stores, will stimulate appetite and rebuild systems. Follow the directions on the tube for dosage.

Kittens should be weighed frequently to ensure that they are growing properly. You'll soon know if your orphans are thriving because they will grow at an incredible rate—usually four ounces per week.

STIMULATION

The kitten's natural mother takes care of both ends of her baby. By licking the kitten's lower abdomen, she stimulates the bowels and bladder and tidies up the resulting mess. A surrogate cat mom (you!) should gently rub the kitten's bottom with a cotton ball or pad or tissues moistened with warm water. This stimulates the discharge of waste and keeps the kitten clean. Be careful to rub only enough to get them to expel waste materials. Keep the area clean and watch for chafing which might indicate that you are rubbing too hard or not cleaning well enough.

When you feed and clean the kittens, wash their fur all over with a barely damp cloth and use short strokes as their mother would when licking them. This cleans their fur, teaches them to clean themselves, and gives them a feeling of attention and well being.

If the kitten has diarrhea and becomes caked with stool, it is easier on their skin to wash their bottoms with warm water by holding their bottom under a gently running faucet rather than using a wet cloth.

The kitten's instinctive need to suckle (frustrated by the lack of the mother's breast) may cause the kitten to suckle its litter-mate's ears, tail or genitals, causing irritations to develop. Try to satisfy this need by caressing each kitten's mouth with your finger or a soft cloth and providing them with a soft blanket to suckle on.

FLEAS

Abandoned kittens will need to be cleaned and rid of fleas soon after they are found. Flea anemia can hamper any attempt to save the kitten and fleas carry tapeworm eggs. Using a flea comb is safest, although one tiny drop of **Advantage** on the back of the neck has been found to be safe and effective and quick to kill fleas while not harming even day old kittens. Do not use other flea products as they could kill your kitten!

WEANING (transitioning to solid food)

If necessary, you may begin weaning the kitten at 4 to 5 weeks of age. Start by feeding it warmed formula in a bowl, then gradually introduce solid food. Gerber Chicken Meat baby food or canned Kitten food, mixed with warm water or warm KMR, works well. Or you can moisten dry Royal Canin Baby Cat kitten food with formula or water. Don't expect the kitten to be weaned overnight—it can take a while. As the kitten eats more often from the bowl, you can begin to reduce the bottle feedings, but don't stop the bottle until you're sure your kitten is eating enough solid food on his own.

Try to buy high quality food for the kittens (from the vet or pet food stores). Much of what is sold in supermarkets is pure junk food and may not help your kitten thrive.

Changes in diet or certain foods can cause diarrhea, so please keep an eye on stools. Diarrhea can be life threatening to a young kitten.

LITTER BOX TRAINING

The four-week mark is a good time to introduce the kitten to the litter box. Place the kitten in the box after each meal. You can also hold them over the box while you stimulate them to give them the idea and place the soiled tissue in the corner of the box so the scent will draw them back to the box. You may have to take the kitten's paw and show it how to scratch in the litter. Usually the kitten will catch on quickly.

LOVE AND ATTENTION

Besides food, warmth and stimulation, the kitten needs emotional closeness. Pet it frequently and let it snuggle against your warm skin as often as possible.

Some experts believe that hand-raised kittens show higher intelligence, greater loyalty and deeper affection for their owners.

MILESTONES

At birth, a kitten should weigh 2-4 ounces. By the end of its first week it should double in body weight. The kitten should open its eyes at about eight days. The eyes will stay blue for about four more weeks. (The true eye color will not appear until the kitten is about three-months-old.)

At two weeks the ears will start to stand up. At about three weeks the kitten will try to walk. At four weeks kittens start to play with each other and develop teeth.

The kitten should be ready for adoption at eight weeks, and can be spayed or neutered at that time if in good health as well as receive its first FVRCP vaccination.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

Orphaned kittens are especially vulnerable to diseases. At the first sign of any abnormal behavior or loss of appetite, please take them to the veterinarian. Things to watch for:

- Upper respiratory infections, like human colds, are caused by various viruses and claim many kittens each year. Some of these same viruses, or an organism known as Chlamydia, can also cause permanent damage to a kitten's eyes. If bacteria invade the infected eye, the organisms can puncture the tough covering, resulting in blindness. Even a lesser infection can leave the eye badly scarred.
- Diarrhea can result from disease, food changes, parasites, or overfeeding. The resulting dehydration can be deadly.
- Distemper is also a chronic danger to young cats, especially those who did not have the advantage of the mother cat's antibodies. It is airborne, very contagious, and often a killer.

A FINAL WORD

Caring for an orphaned kitten can be difficult and even the most conscientious foster parent may lose a little one. If a kitten dies, the foster parent should not blame himself or herself. A kitten is most likely to die at birth, in its first week, or during the weaning process. But, armed with common sense and an ability to care (as well as accurate information), you have a good chance of raising a motherless kitten to the adoption age and giving him or her a chance to have a good life! ***Please be sure to spay or neuter your kitten!***



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Pre-Wean Kitten Shopping List

For Kittens under 4 weeks (less than 1 lb.)

KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer)
Four Paws or PetAg Nursing Bottles
Feeding Syringe (optional)
BeneBac
Microwaveable Heating Disk
Flea Comb
Small Pet Carrier
Small Cat Bed (or soft blanket)

For Kittens 4-8 weeks (1-2 lbs.)

KMR (up to 6 weeks)
Four Paws or PetAg Nursing Bottles (up to 6 weeks)
BeneBac
Nature's Variety Instinct Chicken, Wellness or Chicken Soup
Kitten canned food
Halo Sensitive Formula Turkey or Royal Canin BabyCat kibble
Shallow Food & Water bowls
Smart Litter Organic & Safe (or other kitten safe litter)
Small Litter Pan
Litter Scoop
Flea Comb
Small Pet Carrier
Small Cat Bed (or soft blanket)

Stages of Kitten Development

Week 1 (1-7 days)



- Kittens are born blind and deaf. Their eyes are closed and their ears folded down. They are pinkish and smaller than your hand.
- The umbilical cord remains attached for the first three days.
- Weight: At birth they usually weigh between 2 and 4 ounces.
- They will need to be bottle fed and helped with elimination.
- Newborn kittens are unable to regulate their body temperature. Keep their environment at a constant of 80-90 degrees.

Week 2 (8-14 days)

- Eyes begin to open though vision is poor at this stage. Do not force eyes open as it could result in damage. Eyes are still blue. Watch for any signs of infection such as crustiness or secretion.
- Weight: Kittens should gain approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ an ounce a day, and by day 14, the kitten should have doubled its birth weight.



Week 3 (15-21 days)

- At 15 days old kittens can be bottle fed every 4-6 hours and will still need help with elimination.
- They will begin to shakily move about and may try to walk and explore.
- Ears will be erect. Eyes are wide open.
- Baby teeth begin to come in and they can now purr!

Week 4 (22-28 days)

- Kittens are becoming more active and mobile.
- Their eyesight is improving, though not fully developed.
- Their sense of hearing is now well developed.
- You may start to provide a small plate of water or warmed KMR.



Week 5 (29-35 days)

- At 28 days old kittens should weigh 1lb. and you may start introducing kitten canned and dry food. Mixing the new food with kitten formula will make the transition easier.
- Kittens this age can start to learn to use a litter box.
- Kittens are more coordinated and physically active.

Weeks 6 to 8 (36-60 days)

- Kittens should be eating four small meals a day and by eight weeks should be eating mostly solid food.
- They should have almost all of their baby teeth by now.
- Healthy kittens this age should be extremely active.
- Kittens receive their first vaccinations at 6-8 weeks of age.
- At two months they should weigh 2lbs and can be spayed or neutered.



IMPORTANT!

This is a guide only, as all kittens develop at their own pace, but it does provide you with a rough idea as to what should be happening when. It is important to keep records of weight; kittens should gain weight steadily—about 4 ounces a week. If they are not gaining weight, please contact a veterinarian immediately. Also be on the look out for signs of illness in your kitten. These could include: loss of appetite, sleeping alone (at a very young age), rejection from the mother, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, sneezing, discharge from the eyes or nose, etc. If you are at all worried, please seek veterinary advice.

Bay Area Low Cost Spay/Neuter Programs

All clinics require appointments unless otherwise specified. Availability & fees may vary depending on funding.

Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society - (510) 845-3633

2700 Ninth Street - Berkeley, CA 94710

<http://www.berkeleyhumane.org/programs/spayneuter>

For residents of Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, El Cerrito, Emeryville, Oakland and Richmond

Reduced cost clinic every Tuesday for low-income residents

Cats: Male - \$45; Female - \$55

FREE spay/neuter services for feral cats

Contra Costa County Animal Services - 925-335-8320

4800 Imhoff Place - Martinez, CA 94553

<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.asp?NID=811>

No residential requirements

Cats: Male - \$25; Female - \$45

East Bay SPCA

Oakland Spay/Neuter Clinic - 510.639.7387 – 410 Hegenberger Loop - Oakland, CA 94621

Tri-Valley Spay/Neuter Center in Dublin - 925.479.9674 - 4651 Gleason Drive - Dublin, CA 94568

<http://www.eastbayspca.org/Page.aspx?pid=374>

For residents of Alameda and Contra Costa counties

Cats - \$60 (low income prices available)

Marin Humane Society - 415-883-3383

171 Bel Marin Keys Boulevard - Novato, CA 94949

<http://www.marinhumanesociety.org/ProgramsServices/VetClinic/SpayNeuterClinic.html>

For residents of Marin County

Cats: Male - \$55; Female - \$60

Special Low Cost Clinics and Feral Cat Package also available

Monterey County SPCA - 831-373-2631

1002 Highway 68 - Monterey, CA 93942

<http://www.spcamc.org/spay-neuter.htm>

For residents of Monterey County

Cats: Male - \$45.00; Female - \$100 (+\$25 if pregnant or in heat)

Special \$5 "Neutermania" program available November through January

Napa Humane Society - 707-252-7442 x251

Spay/Neuter Clinic – 3265 California Boulevard - Napa, CA 94558

http://www.napahumane.org/clinic_fees.html

For residents of Napa County

Cats: Male - \$35; Female - \$45

Palo Alto Animal Services - 650-496-5933

3281 E. Bayshore Road - Palo Alto, California 94303

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/depts/pol/news/details.asp?NewsID=226&TargetID=84>

For residents of Palo Alto, Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills

Cats: Male - \$55; Female - \$80 (\$5 discount for cats under 5 months)

Peninsula Humane Society - 650-340-7025

12 Airport Boulevard - San Mateo, CA 94401

<http://www.peninsulahumanesociety.org/services/clinic.html>

For residents of San Mateo County

Cats: Male - \$50; Female - \$60

Feral Cat Package available

San Jose Animal Care & Services - 408-794-7201

2750 Monterey Highway - San Jose, CA 95111

<http://www.sanjoseanimals.com/clinic.asp>

For residents of S.J., Cupertino, Los Gatos, Milpitas & Saratoga

Cats: Male - \$15; Female - \$20

Non-resident rates: Male - \$50; Female - \$60 (space permitting)

\$25 feral cat package for residents

Feral cats accepted on a walk-in basis Tue. –Thu. from 8:00am-8:30am in humane traps ONLY!

San Francisco SPCA - 415-554-3030

201 Alabama Street - San Francisco, CA 94103

<http://www.sfspca.org/veterinary-hospital/veterinary-services/spay-neuter-clinic>

FREE Feral Cat Spay/Neuter: <http://www.sfspca.org/programs-services/feral-fix>

Cats: Male - \$100; Female - \$140 (Various discounts available)

Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority - 408-764-0358

3370 Thomas Road - Santa Clara, CA 95054

http://www.svaca.com/services/spay_neuter.html

For residents of Santa Clara, Campbell and Monte Sereno; low income vouchers available

Cats: Male - \$25; Female - \$25

Solano County Animal Services - 707-784-1356

2510 Clay Bank Road - Fairfield, CA 94533

<http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/genserv/animalcare/qi.asp>

For residents of Solano County

Cats: Male - \$25; Female - \$45 (additional charges if pregnant or in-heat)

Sonoma Humane Society - 707-284-1198

Humane Society Veterinary Hospital 5345 Highway 12 - West Santa Rosa, CA 95407

http://www.sonomahumane.org/hospital/spay_neuter_surgery.html

For residents of Sonoma County

Cats: Male - \$72; Female - \$102

This is merely a partial list of Low Cost Spay/Neuter clinics available in the Bay Area. Please contact your local shelter or rescue groups for additional spay/neuter program information.

NOTE: Many spay/neuter clinics offer reduced or free spay/neuter & vaccination packages for feral (homeless) cats. Please contact clinics individually for program details and requirements.

Or to learn more about how you can help, visit:

Fix Our Ferals 510-433-9446 - <http://fixourferals.org/>

Peninsula Fix Our Ferals 650-261-6665 - <http://www.peninsulafixourferals.org/>

Tri-Valley Fix Our Ferals 925-264-7703 - <http://www.tri-valleyfixourferals.org/>

Finding a Good Home for Your Found Kittens

If you have found kittens and made the compassionate choice to save their lives by fostering them until they are old enough to be adopted—Thank You! We hope that the information provided to you in this packet will help you to care for these kittens until they reach an adoptable age.

Once your kittens reach eight weeks old and weigh at least two pounds, they can be spayed and neutered and placed for adoption! You can then bring them to your local shelter and surrender them for spay/neuter and adoption through the shelter, OR you can make an appointment and have them spayed or neutered at one of the many low cost clinics in the Bay Area and then find them good homes on your own. **NEVER give away an unspayed or unneutered kitten!** Giving just one unfixed kitten to someone who doesn't get him or her fixed before they reach puberty (4-6 months old!) can cause hundreds of unwanted kittens to be born and then killed for lack of a home!

If you ultimately decide that you cannot keep your kittens, you have several options.

- **You can surrender the kittens to your local animal shelter.** Most shelters screen potential adopters to make sure that they will be able to provide a safe, responsible, and loving home for your kittens. Remember that they **MUST** be *at least* two months old and weigh *at least* two pounds or they will be euthanized (killed). Due to the high volume of animals being surrendered to shelters, there is no guarantee that your kittens will find homes as shelters have limited space and many kittens become sick with upper respiratory infections from being housed in close quarters before they can be put up for adoption. However, shelters *always* spay and neuter their animals and vaccinate them before placing them up for adoption, so you can be assured that your kittens will not contribute to the overpopulation problem!
- **Contact local rescue groups.** In some cases, animal rescue groups can help by taking in your kittens and finding them homes through adoption fairs. Be sure to find out as much as you can about the rescue group, and always carefully screen a rescue organization before relinquishing your kitten. You should make sure the current animal residents appear well cared for, that the group screens potential adopters, that they require spay and neuter, and that the group offers post-adoption support services. Do not be afraid to ask questions!
- **Find a new home for your kittens yourself.** If you decide to try to find a new home for your kittens yourself, rather than relying upon your animal shelter or a rescue organization, be sure the kittens' best interests remain your top priority. Finding a new home for a kitten can be difficult. A "good" home means a home where the kitten will live for the rest of his or her life, where he or she will receive attention, veterinary care, proper nutrition, and be treated as part of the family – **AND YOU MUST BE SURE TO SPAY AND NEUTER THEM ALL!**

If you choose to find a home for your kittens yourself, please follow these guidelines:

- **Advertise through friends, neighbors, and local veterinarians first; then try the newspaper and craigslist.org, if all else fails.** Your chances of finding a good home are increased when you check references with someone you know.
- **Visit the prospective new home in order to get a feel for the environment in which your kittens will be living.** Explain that the kitten is part of your family and that you want to make sure she will be cared for properly and that you want to see how the kitten responds to the new home. Screen potential homes carefully.
- **Don't be fooled.** If anyone refuses to allow you to visit their home, do not place your kittens with them. Individuals known as "bunchers" routinely answer "free-to-good-home" ads, posing as people who want family pets when, in actuality, they sell pets to animal dealers. Dogfighters have also been known to obtain kittens for baiting through "free to good home" ads. These people are "professionals" who may even bring children or their mothers with them when picking up kittens.
- **Always be mindful of your own safety when you go to interview potential adopters or if you allow a prospective adopter to enter your home.**
- **Carefully consider all the elements of the new home:** Will your kittens get along with small children? Is the family planning to let the kittens outside? Will the cat be kept only as a mouser? Does the family have a veterinary reference? Do not be shy about asking questions. Your kittens' life and happiness may depend on it.
- **Ask for a valid form of identification (preferably a driver's license).** Record the number for your records and require the new owner to sign a contract stating the requirements of adoption upon which both parties agree. As part of the contract, require the new owner to contact you if he or she decides at some point that they must give up the kitten.
- **Have your kitten neutered or spayed before he or she goes to the new home.** This will make the kitten more adoptable and help stop irresponsible breeding.

Thank you for doing the right thing and helping to save lives!



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