



InfoCARE | Supporting Informal Caregivers of People with Dementia

Module 2 Prevention



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Let's get started...





Module's Overview



The probability of developing dementia increases with age. But there is compelling evidence that **the risk of dementia can be reduced by timely prevention as well as detection and treatment of cardiovascular risk factors**. What is good for the heart is usually good for the brain.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest that it is possible to completely eliminate the risk of dementia. However, as dementia often starts late in life, even a small delay can have a major impact on the duration of the disease.

In dementia cases, an early diagnosis and prevention is also key to delay its effects and ensure quality of life for the person diagnosed for as long as possible.





Module's Overview

Preventing dementia is about:

- » reducing the risk of developing dementia
- » delaying the onset of dementia
- » slowing down its progression when it has been diagnosed



This module will introduce learners to **evidence-based knowledge and advice on how to reduce the overall risk of dementia and slow down its progression**. For informal caregivers, it will provide a variety of practical advice to put in practice with their aged relatives or people they care for.



Learning Goals

By the end of this module, you will know:

1

What are the risk factors and protective factors affecting dementia

2

How to lead a dementia-preventative lifestyle

3

What are the actions to prevent the development of dementia

4

How to maintain healthy lifestyle changes

Let's deep-dive into contents...





Risk Factors and Protective Factors



The risk of dementia increases with age, but there is much we can do to prevent the disease.

Researchers believe that up to 40% of dementia cases are linked to **lifestyle factors**, meaning conditions that all of us can change in order to prevent or delay the onset of this disorder in later stages of our lives.

Moreover, **informal caregivers can significantly help the person they care for to adopt this preventative lifestyle**, whether the person has already been diagnosed with dementia or not.

On the next slide you will find a list of **risk factors** to consider in daily life and recommended **protective factors** that decrease the risk of developing dementia.





Risk Factors and Protective Factors



Risk Factors



Smoking

High blood pressure
(hypertension) in mid-life

Type 2 diabetes

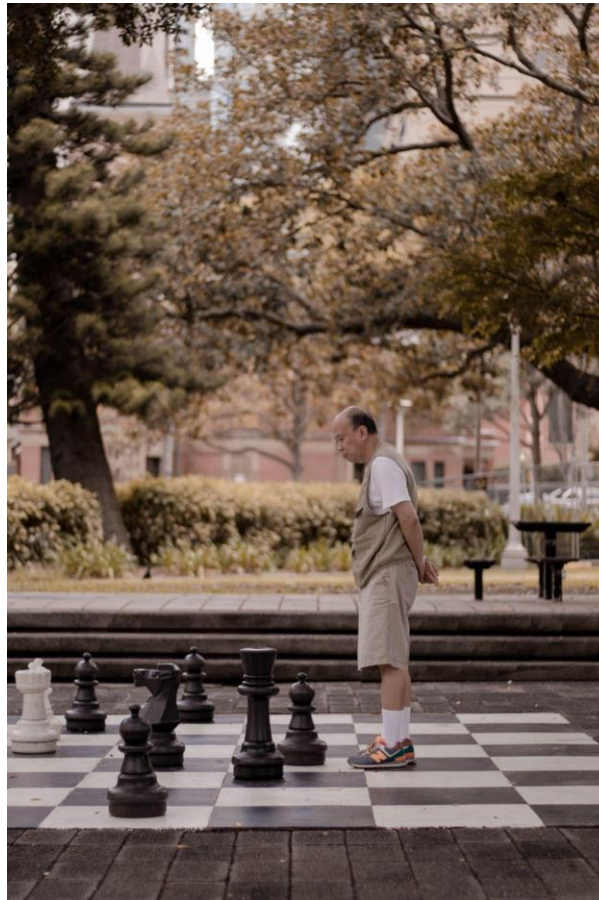
Traumatic brain injury

Episode(s) of depression
requiring treatment

Unaided hearing loss

Obesity in mid-life

Physical inactivity



Protective Factors



Keep your brain active

Be physically active

Be socially active

Eat healthily and reduce
alcohol consumption

Check blood sugar,
cholesterol and blood
pressure

Check your hearing

Don't smoke

You can learn more about the protective factors by reading the next slides.





Keep your brain active

The more you use your brain - the more robust it becomes. In other words, it is more resilient if dementia starts to develop. Studies show that people with a higher education and a varied and intellectually demanding job have a statistically lower risk of dementia than people with a shorter education and a relatively routine job.



Make sure you **keep your brain busy with new things throughout your life** and especially as you get older. For example, play music, board games or computer games, learn a new language, read books, keep a diary or become a volunteer.

As an informal caregiver, you can encourage the person you care for to do these activities or even do them together to stimulate them.

Anything that stimulates and challenges the brain is likely to have a beneficial effect. At the same time, be aware that the effect diminishes if the activity starts to become routine.



Be physically active



Regular physical activity is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of dementia. It's good for the heart, circulation, weight and mental wellbeing. Therefore it's important that physical activity and exercise are prioritised in dementia prevention.

If you or the person you care for have already developed dementia, the symptoms can indirectly lead to a weakening of body functions. Reduced memory, impaired language skills, impaired overview and impaired initiative can reduce the social life and make everyday tasks hard to cope with. These changes lead to less physical activity, which weakens the body's functions. That's why **it's important to continue being physically active throughout life**.





Be physically active



You or the person you care for might find it difficult to start being more physically active, or worry that you have to do activities you don't enjoy. It's important to **find activities that work for you**. It might be helpful to start off with a small amount of activity and then build up gradually.

There are two main types of physical activity – **aerobic activity** and **strength-building activity**. Each type will keep you fit in different ways. Doing a combination of these activities will help to reduce the risk of dementia.

See next page for more information on each activity type.





Be physically active



Aerobic activity

Aerobic activity helps to keep heart, lungs and blood circulation healthy – and this is good for brain health too.

‘Moderate intensity’ aerobic activity is anything that makes you breathe faster and feel warmer. **‘Vigorous’ activity** is anything that makes you sweat or get out of breath after a while, making it difficult to talk without pausing for breath.

In general, one minute of vigorous activity is equal to two minutes of moderate intensity activity.

It is recommended to try to do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity each week or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. You can break this activity up into smaller sessions if it’s easier for you.

Strength-building activity

Strength-building activity works major muscles (legs, back, stomach, shoulders, arms).

This helps you to do everyday tasks. This type of activity also helps to control the level of sugars in your blood and reduce the risk of diabetes, which is a risk factor for dementia.

Ideally you or the person you care for should do strength- building activities on at least two or more days each week.

Physical activity with dementia

Physical training, for example with tools, will usually only be possible in the early stage of dementia - unless the activity is assisted.

However, **familiar physical activities, for example sports, can be maintained well into the course of the disorder.**

As dementia progresses, physical training can be modified to be more like exercise or play, with a focus on stimulating the senses, balance, responsiveness and alertness.

It is important to remember that sensory stimulation can and should take place throughout life.



Be socially active

Be social and have fun with friends and family. Social activities are a great way to reduce the risk of getting dementia because they are stimulating for both the brain and intellectual functions. If you live alone, seek out clubs and events where you can connect with other people. This includes **interacting with other people online as well as in person.**

Having a conversation with someone can exercise a wide range of mental skills, for example:

- » actively listening to and communicating with the other person
- » considering the meaning of what someone is trying to tell you and how they feel
- » finding the right way to express what you want to say and putting words together in the right order for someone to understand
- » recalling things that have happened which are relevant to what you're talking about.





Eat healthily and reduce alcohol consumption



What's good for the heart is good for the brain. There is a significant overlap between risk factors for cardiovascular disease and risk factors for vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Eating a healthy diet may reduce the risk of dementia and other conditions including cancer, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

No single ingredient, nutrient or food can improve brain health by itself. Instead, **eating a range of different foods in the right proportions is what makes the difference.** This is known as a 'balanced' diet.

Studies show that **the Mediterranean diet** - known to give people around the Mediterranean healthy hearts and long lives - also has a dementia preventive effect. It reduces inflammation, lowers oxidative stress (thought to be a precursor to the disease), and helps prevent diabetes.



Go to ***"Where to find more information"*** to learn more about the Mediterranean Diet.



Eat healthily and reduce alcohol consumption



Drinking too much alcohol increases the risk of developing dementia. If you or the person you care for drink regularly, try to do so in moderation and within the recommended limits of no more than 14 units of alcohol each week.

Drinking too much alcohol at one time exposes the brain to high levels of harmful chemicals.

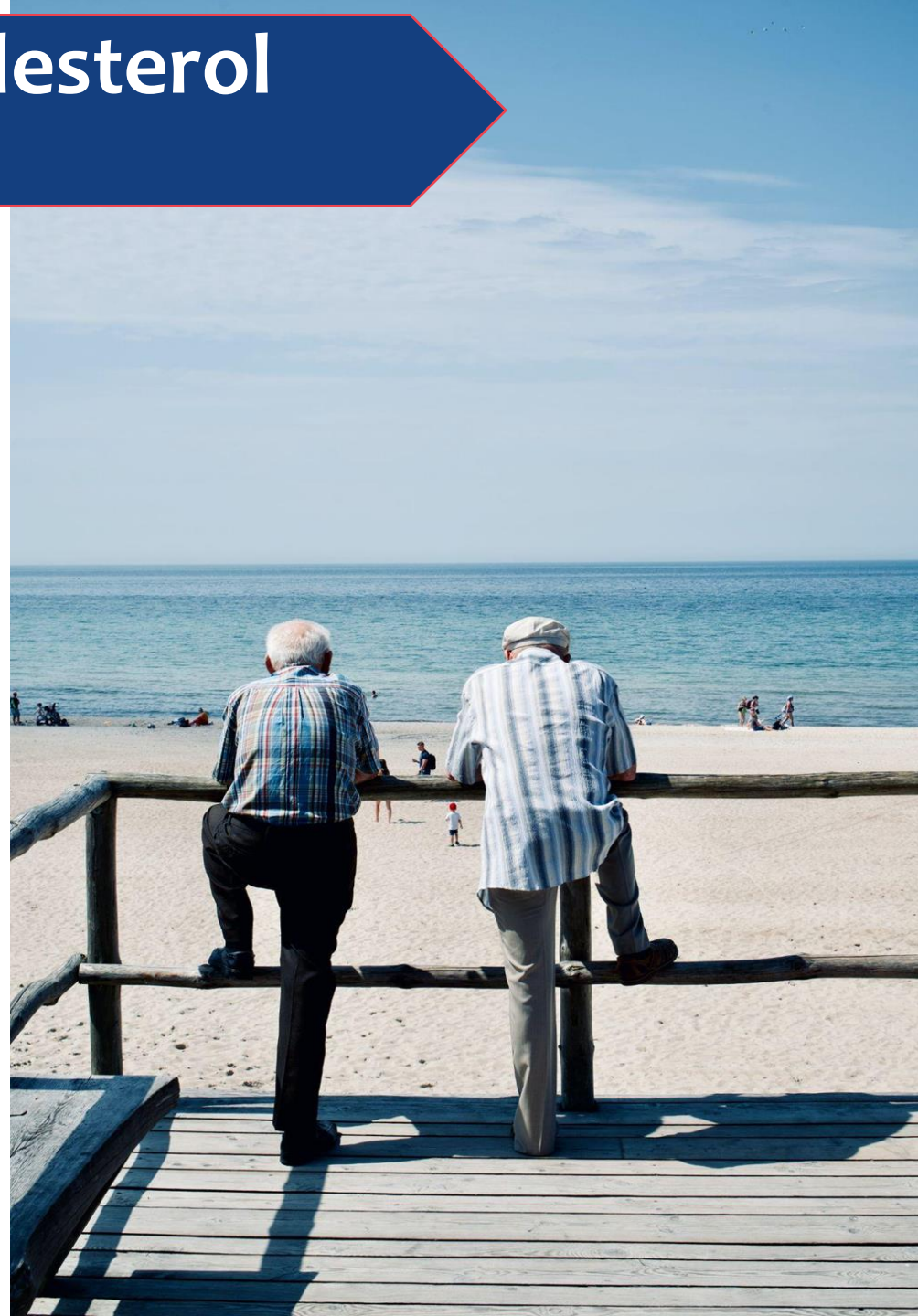




Check blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure

High blood pressure and high cholesterol can lead to dementia. So can poorly regulated diabetes.

That's why it's important to see the doctor regularly for check-ups and to deal with any problems in a timely manner.





Check your hearing



Loss of hearing is completely normal to experience at some point in life. The prevalence of hearing loss increases with age and more than 25% among those older than 60 years are affected by disabling hearing loss.

Since hearing loss might result in cognitive decline through reduced cognitive stimulation, it is encouraged that people with hearing loss **use hearing aids to reduce the risk of dementia**. Especially hearing loss in mid-life is connected to a greater risk of developing dementia. Make sure to get your or your relative's hearing tested by a qualified doctor or hearing health care professional if you experience any symptoms of hearing loss.

Because most cases of hearing loss develop gradually, the **symptoms are often difficult to recognise**. The first step in treating hearing loss is realising that there is a problem.



Check your hearing

Some symptoms of hearing loss are if you:

- » experience difficulties in hearing someone calling to you from behind or from another room
- » have difficulties in hearing women's and children's voices
- » have difficulties in communicating in a small group of people, for example at meetings
- » feel that people are mumbling to you.





Don't smoke

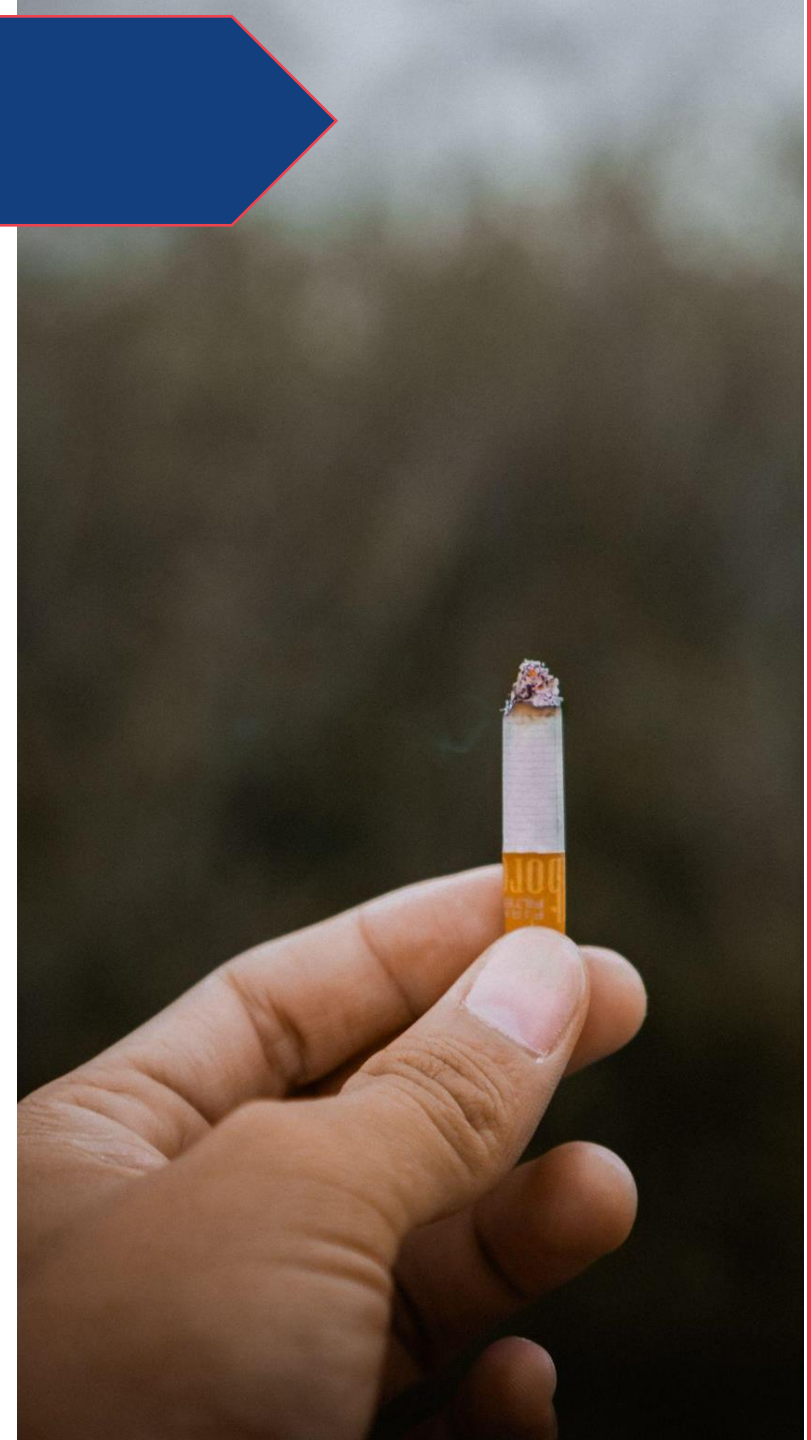
Smoking is associated with a significantly increased risk of dementia. **Quitting smoking reduces the risk of dementia to normal levels over time.**

Smoking does a lot of harm to the circulation of blood around the body, particularly the blood vessels in the brain, as well as the heart and lungs.

The higher the tobacco consumption, the higher the risk of dementia. A consumption of 20 cigarettes a day increases the risk by about 34%, while 40 cigarettes a day increases the risk by about 80%. It is estimated that smoking is responsible for almost 6% of dementia cases and about 7.5% of Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia cases.

It's never too late to quit smoking. The earlier you stop, the more brain damage you will avoid.

You can always contact your doctor for advice on how to quit.





How to maintain healthy lifestyle changes



What is your motivation for a lifestyle change - what is at stake?

Small steps don't sound like much if you want to run 5 kilometres or lose 10 kg. But it's exactly small steps that can take you or the person you care for towards a healthier lifestyle. Here are 4 suggestions on **how you can get started on new habits** and change your lifestyle in the process:

» **What do you want to achieve?**

You need to establish why you want to change your lifestyle. What values does it bring to you? The answer may be about retaining the cognitive functions and staying autonomous for as long as possible, to be able to play with your grandchildren or to keep doing the hobby you are passionate about.

Whichever the purpose is, you need to feel the impact and make sense of your lifestyle change. Then it's easier to stick with it in the long run.

As an informal caregiver, you can be a meaningful help and guidance for the person you care for, in order to answer these questions and help them gain motivation.



How to maintain healthy lifestyle changes



» **One thing at a time**

A lifestyle change usually involves several habits. But **changing many habits at the same time can be overwhelming** and you or the person you care for are likely to lose the spirit.

Succeed by changing one habit at a time. Find out what you or the person you care for are ready to change first. Changing lifestyle should be encouraging, so take small steps at a time.

» **Involve a buddy**

Whether it is a friend, coworker, family member or a caregiver, **someone else in your life can keep you motivated and accountable.**

Having someone with whom to share struggles and successes makes the work easier and the mission less intimidating. In this sense, **an informal caregiver can be that buddy, supporting the person and making sure they do not give up.** Joining a support group can be also of great help in this purpose.



How to maintain healthy lifestyle changes

» Make a clear plan and adjust along the way

You can get started on a lifestyle change in many different ways. Make a clear plan to start with. It's not enough to say 'I want to live healthier'.

Which habit do you choose? Which days will you work on the new habit? What will you do? For some, a meal plan acts as a pathway to more vegetables in the diet. For others, getting vegetables ready for several days at a time is a good plan. **Evaluate your plan continually: is it taking you in the direction you want?**



Check what you learned...





Lessons Learned



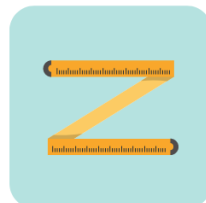
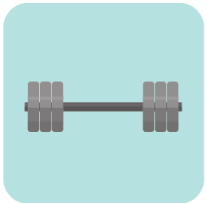
In this module, we've learned about risk factors and protective factors when it comes to developing dementia.



A good rule of thumb is that what is good for your heart is also good for your brain.



Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be challenging but it is possible. You can help yourself achieve your goals by setting a clear plan, taking small steps towards your goals, involving a buddy in your process and evaluating your plan continually.





Quiz Time!



1) How many dementia cases do researchers believe are linked to lifestyle factors?

- A. 30%
- B. 40%
- C. 50%

2) What should you do to keep your brain active and make it more robust?

- A. Talk to friends and family regularly
- B. Stimulate and challenge yourself with new activities throughout your life
- C. Eat vitamins and supplements daily

3) Chose 4 mental skills you develop when having conversations with other people:

- A. Active listening
- B. Rational thinking
- C. Considering the meaning and feeling of others
- D. Self-expression
- E. A sense of humor
- F. Recollection of events

*Answers at
the end of
the
module!*

Extend your knowledge...





Glossary

Risk Factor » a factor (individual characteristic, environmental condition, habits or behaviors) that predisposes an individual to develop a particular disease or increases the impact of stressful life events.

Protective Factor » a factor (individual characteristic, environmental condition, habits or behaviors) that reduces the effects of stressful life events or prevent the onset of a particular disease.

Mediterranean diet » a diet that consists primarily of bright colored fruits and vegetables, healthy herbs and spices, olive oil, red wine, and whole grains.



Where to find more information



» **3 Ways to Prevent Dementia You Should Know | MedCircle, YouTube video**

Watch this short video on how to lower your risk of developing dementia.

Link: <https://youtu.be/uGDypcvptX8>

» **Dementia - Reducing Your Risk | Alzheimer's Society booklet, PDF**

This booklet tells you about dementia and the changes you can make to lower your risk of getting dementia.

Link: https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia_reducing_your_risk.pdf

» **20 Min Exercise for Seniors, Elderly, & Older People - Seated Chair Exercise Senior Workout Routines Instructions | HASfit, YouTube video**

This video will guide you through a 20-minute workout routine with examples of exercises you can do both sitting down and standing up. It's a good way to begin exercising in the comfort of your own home.

Link: <https://youtu.be/8CE4ijWIQ18>

» **Alzheimer's Prevention Tools | Alzheimer's.net**

This article provides practical information on what traditional Mediterranean Diet's specific foods to eat or avoid for the prevention of Dementia.

Link: <https://www.alzheimers.net/alzheimers-prevention-tools>

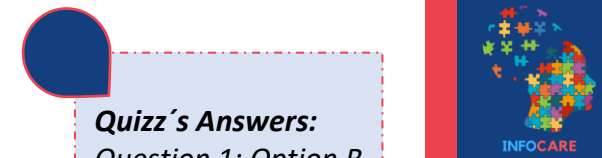
» **Mediterranean Diet Recipes | allrecipes**

Find recipes that fit the Mediterranean diet, using lots of olive oil, fresh fruit and veggies, beans, and fish.

Link: <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipes/16704/healthy-recipes/mediterranean-diet/>



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Quiz's Answers:

Question 1: Option B

Question 2: Option B

Question 3: Options
A, C, D & F

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InfoCARE | Supporting Informal Caregivers of People with Dementia



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InfoCARE Consortium



Austrian Association of
Inclusive Society



ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ ΝΟΣΟΥ ΑΛΖΧΕΙΜΕΡ ΗΚΑ ΕΠΙΤΕΡΩΝ ΣΥΝΤΑΡΑΧΩΝ



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