#LIVINGWELLWNY

READY FOR EXERCISE?

Resource Guide for People with Disabilities
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WHY EXERCISE?

You might think of exercise as a way to lose weight, and you are right! However, exercise is more crucial to your overall health, than just a means to drop a few pounds.

Participating in regular physical activity on a daily basis is necessary to keep you healthy and to prevent many chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and even some cancers. Regular physical activity also lowers blood pressure, reduces arthritis symptoms, improves balance, and improves joint mobility. On top of all these great physical benefits, it just makes you generally feel better, you will have more energy, sleep better and be more confident. Why wouldn’t you want to exercise?

Need another reason to be more active? How about this, if you are a person with a disability or a physical impairment, and do not exercise, you are 50% more likely to suffer from chronic disease than those who get the recommended 30 minutes a day of physical activity. Stop and think about that for a moment.

As a person with physical limitations becomes stronger and more flexible with consistent exercise, they will start to experience greater independence with everyday tasks, like extending your reach or doing transfers without help from someone.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends ALL adults get at least 150 minutes of aerobic activity AND 2 days of muscle-strengthening activity EVERY WEEK.

According to the guidelines, “when adults with chronic conditions or disabilities...
**WHY EXERCISE?**

are not able to meet the above key guidelines they should engage in regular physical activity according to their abilities and should **avoid inactivity**”. They should also consult their healthcare provider, or physical activity specialist about the types and amounts of activity appropriate for their abilities and chronic conditions. In some cases, it may be better to start off with less than 150 minutes a week, increasing the duration as you grow stronger.

Perhaps you are wondering, how can I possibly be physically active when I; have a disability, suffer from severe obesity, have a breathing condition, am stiff with arthritis, or am elderly and afraid of falling? The truth is you **CAN** be active, you just need to find what works for you. Talk with your doctor, physical therapist or other healthcare provider for suggestions on what may work best for you. Any activity is better than inactivity and you will still reap all the physical and mental benefits from exercise.

The remaining sections of this guide are designed to provide you with various options to keep yourself active. From local recreation programs to scenic outdoor paths to exercise done in the comfort of your own home, there is something for everyone to get you started.
EXERCISING OUTDOORS: ACCESSIBLE TRAILS

Walking or wheeling around town are great ways to get the recommended 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity a day. Researchers at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville identified how many calories can be burned self-propelling a wheelchair. The average adult can burn up to **120 calories in half an hour** when **wheeling at 2 mph** on a flat surface. Being outside gives you the added bonus of fresh air and sunshine, which helps boost your mood and provides vitamin D. **New York** has plenty of beautiful outdoor **wheelchair accessible** trails and parks to visit. Here are a few online links to find the best trail near you:

**TrailLink** Trail Link: [https://www.traillink.com/stateactivity/ny-wheelchair-accessible-trails/](https://www.traillink.com/stateactivity/ny-wheelchair-accessible-trails/) for an interactive map of where to find accessible trails across NY state

**AllTrails** AllTrails: [https://www.alltrails.com/us/new-york/ada](https://www.alltrails.com/us/new-york/ada), find trail maps driving directions and consumer reviews.

**NY State’s Department of Environmental Conservation:** [http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/34038.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/34038.html) provides descriptions for many accessible features of the NY State Parks separated by county
EXERCISING AT HOME: ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT

Working out at Home is convenient and inexpensive! You might just need some simple equipment to help you be more effective with each movement.

There are several pieces of adaptive equipment that can help you perform your exercise program with greater ease. For more information on how to order adaptive equipment, visit: www.nchpad.org.

Grasping Cuff or Activity Mitts

Grasping cuffs can be used when grip strength or hand function is limited. Grasping cuffs are very helpful and effective for hands to grip weight machines or dumbbells.

Wrist Cuff

The use of nylon cuffs with a metal ring is a great way to perform resistance exercises by wearing the cuff on the residual limb. The metal ring should be strong enough to attach weighted resistance to. Depending on the length of the residual limb, you may be able to perform many strength exercises by attaching the nylon cuff with a metal ring to either resistance bands or cable resistance. Wrist cuffs can also be used for individuals with limited hand function.

Stabilizing Straps

For those who have difficulty with balance and stability, stabilizing straps and gait belts aid in proper seating and positioning in a wheelchair.
Ankle and Wrist Weights

Ankle weights and wrist weights are weighted cuffs that can be used for various strength training activities. These can be highly effective for persons using wheelchairs in terms of both upper extremity and lower extremity movements. These weighted cuffs can be secured to the body by using an adjustable Velcro strap.

Medicine Ball

A medicine ball is a weighted ball used during strength training. For individuals with limited hand function, a ball with a textured surface, handles, or straps should be used.

Elastic Bands or Tubing

Elastic bands or tubing are effective, low-cost, and portable pieces of equipment that allow exercise comparable to activities done with free weights. They provide varying degrees of resistance according to their color and can be performed virtually anywhere, whether seated or standing. To increase the resistance, you may allow less slack in the band or move it away from your anchor. Anchoring is the process of tying one end of the resistive band to a secure, fixed object.

**Before you begin any exercise routine, check with your doctor that the exercises are suitable for your current physical condition. This is particularly important for those who have any special health concerns. Neither WNY Independent Living nor WNY Healthy Communities Coalition are responsible for any injuries or damaged property incurred while performing the exercises in this guide.**
Things to consider prior to starting an exercise routine

The following are just a small handful of examples of health concerns that require extra examination or measurement of physical state before, during, and/or after participating in exercise.

- Individuals with limb loss due to vascular disorders, such as diabetes or atherosclerosis, should be aware of any activity restrictions instructed by their physician. Due to the fact that exercise can reduce the need for insulin, individuals with diabetes should monitor their glucose frequently and always have a quick-acting carbohydrate fuel to treat hypoglycemia during exercise.
- The maximal heart rate for individuals with tetraplegia (T1 and above) is typically limited to 120 to 130 beats per minute.
- It is important to check for pressure sores before and after every workout. Specifically, check bony areas of the body, such as the elbow, shoulder blade, tailbone, hip, knee, ankle, heel, and the side of the leg pressing against the inside of your wheelchair. Examine these areas for any redness, blisters, openings in skin, or rashes.
- Individuals with surgically placed rods or a spinal fusion should be aware of restrictions to movement and exercises. Consult with your physician to make sure that the exercises in this guide are safe if you have one of these conditions.

Before beginning your exercises, it is important that you first perform a warm-up to prepare the muscles of the body. The warm-up can be any activity that gets you moving, such as light rolling or an aerobic activity such as cycling with an ergometer like this one. Warm up activity should take about 5 minutes.

It is beneficial to exercise most days of the week. The recommended daily activity level for adults is 30 minutes a day and for 5 days a week. Start slowly if you are a beginner or if you have not exercised in a long time. If any of the exercises you perform result in pain or discomfort, stop immediately and let your physician know.

After you complete your cardiovascular exercise and strength training routine, you should also perform a 5-10 minute cool-down, including stretching to maintain range of motion and flexibility. The cool-down is very important to return
your body to its resting state and is a great time to perform flexibility (stretching) exercises.

While stretching, find the point where you feel a slight pull and hold. Do not bounce or try to stretch to a point at which pain is felt. You should breathe regularly. Hold each stretch for 10-30 seconds and repeat. The following section demonstrates some example stretches to do after your exercise session or just on their own to maintain your flexibility.
EXERCISING AT HOME: Stretches for Flexibility or Cool Down

*All exercises were originally described and illustrated in the Discover Accessible Fitness guide from NCHPAD, see sources at the end of Exercising at Home.

**Neck Rotation**
Take a deep breath in, and exhale while turning the head to one side, looking over that shoulder. Hold. Repeat on the opposite side.

**Neck Lateral Flexion**
Take a deep breath in. Exhale as the neck bends to one side and the ear goes down towards the shoulder. Hold. Repeat on the opposite side.

**Neck Forward Flexion**
Take a deep breath in. Exhale as you slowly lower the chin to the chest. Hold.

**Hamstring Stretch**
Lift one leg up and place it out in front of you on a chair, mat, or bench. Take a deep breath in. Exhale as you reach your arms forward as far as possible toward your foot. Hold your foot and gently pull the ball of your foot toward you, flexing your ankle toward you and hold (20 seconds). Repeat with the other leg.
Shoulder Rolls with Depression

Take a deep breath in, and roll the shoulders up towards the ears. Exhale and roll the shoulders back while depressing. Hold.

Posterior Deltoid Stretch

Take a deep breath in, and extend one arm out in front of you. Exhale as you hook the arm slightly above the elbow with the opposite hand, bringing it across and in towards the chest.

Tricep Stretch

Take a deep breath in, and extend both arms above the head. Reach down the center of the back with one arm, and exhale, pressing down slightly with the opposite hand on the elbow. Repeat on the opposite side.

Trunk Rotation

Place the hand on the opposite thigh. Take a deep breath in and exhale while twisting the torso, looking over the shoulder. Hold, and repeat on the opposite side.
Lateral Trunk Flexion

With the arms at your side, take a deep breath in, and exhale as the trunk bends to the left and the right arm extends overhead. Hold, and repeat on the opposite side.

Rhomboid Stretch

Extend the arms out in front, crossing them over so the palms are touching. Inhale and raise the arms up to shoulder height. Exhale and push the shoulders forward. Hold.

Biceps Stretch in Doorway

Extend the left arm out to the side. Place the left fist in the doorway with the palm down. Take a deep breath in, and exhale while turning the head to the right, looking over the right shoulder. Switch sides and repeat.

Seated Chest Stretch in Doorway

Place an arm bent at 90 degrees in doorway. Take a deep breath in, exhale while turning the head to the opposite side, looking over that shoulder. Repeat with other arm, looking over the opposite shoulder.
Chest Stretch (hands clasped behind back)

Clasp hands behind your back. Take a deep breath in. Exhale and roll your shoulders back as you stick out your chest and hold (10 seconds). Unclasp hands and relax.

Wrist Flexion and Extension Stretch

**Extension** – Extend an arm out in front; take a deep breath in, point fingers up, grasp upper palm and lower portion of finger with opposite hand, exhale, pulling palm and fingers towards you. Repeat with other arm.

**Flexion** – Extend an arm out in front; take a deep breath in, point fingers down, grasp upper palm and lower portion of finger with opposite hand. Exhale, pulling palm and fingers towards you. Repeat with other arm.

Shoulder Shrug

Take a deep breath in, lift and hold your shoulders up to your ears and hold (10 seconds). Exhale and allow your shoulders and arms to dropdown by your side reaching toward the floor and hold that stretch (10 seconds).
EXERCISING AT HOME: STRENGTH TRAINING

Before you begin any home strength training exercises, keep these tips in mind:

1. You should feel comfortable with body positioning, moving through a comfortable range of motion, lifting the weight in a slow and controlled manner, lowering the weight in a slow and controlled manner, and breathing – exhale with exertion, do not hold your breath.

2. For all exercises, take a deep breath and exhale during the lifting portion of the exercise and inhale as you return the weight to the starting position. Exercise in front of a mirror and use your own muscles to balance and sit as upright as possible.

3. Start with a weight that you can lift for 12-15 repetitions. If you are able to perform more than 20 repetitions, the weight or resistance can be increased. If you are unable to reach 12 repetitions comfortably, the weight or resistance may be too heavy.

4. If you have problems with balance or trunk instability, do not lift free weights over your head without a spotter or trainer.

5. If you use a wheelchair, always use good stability techniques.

Lateral Stability

- **Leaning** – Stability may be increased by leaning toward the side of the wheelchair opposite the tipping direction.

- **Holding** - If possible, you can hold onto the wheelchair frame or wheel on the opposite side for stability. It may also be possible to hold onto a handrail or another piece of stationary fitness equipment.

- **Use of a spotter** – While lying back on a bench or raised mat area, the assistance of a spotter will help to prevent lateral tipping.

- **Use of a strap** – While lying back on a bench or raised mat area,
a strap around the legs above the knees may be used to keep the legs positioned correctly.

Incorrect Lateral Stability  Correct Lateral Stability

Forward Stability

- **Front wheel caster orientation** – You can increase the stability of your wheelchair in the forward direction by moving your wheelchair backwards to rotate your front casters forward before locking your wheel-locks.

Incorrect front caster position  Correct front caster position

Rearward Stability

- **Rear axle position** – Many manual wheelchairs have adjustable axle positioning to move the rear wheels forward and backward. Be aware that if your wheelchair has the rear wheels positioned forward, making the wheelchair tippy, you may need to be very careful about tipping to the rear when exercising while seated in your wheelchair.

- **Use of a spotter** – Multiple exercises may cause rearward tipping, such as pushing weights forward or upward, or lifting weights above and behind the head. Having a trainer hold down the front of your wheelchair near the front casters or leg supports will prevent your
wheelchair from tipping over to the rear while exercising.

- **Use of weight on the foot support** – A dumbbell can be placed on the foot support of the wheelchair to add extra weight to the front of the chair. This will help to reduce the tendency to tip to the rear while exercising in your wheelchair.

- **Use of a restraint** – A large plate that sits underneath all wheels of the wheelchair with two ratchet straps at the front can be used to hold down the front of the wheelchair during exercise. The wheelchair user can back onto the plate and the two straps are then hooked onto the frame of the wheelchair near the front casters to hold down the front of the wheelchair during exercise.

WARNING: If there is a crepitation or any popping inside the shoulder on any exercise, you should change the movement pattern so that this does not occur. If you do not have good shoulder stability, do not perform any exercises that cause your elbow to move above the height of your shoulder.

Shoulder Abduction

Caution: Lateral Instability
Muscles: Medial Deltoid, Supraspinatus

*Note: Wrist weights can be used for individuals with limited grip strength.*

Grasp a dumbbell. Place the hand you are not lifting with on the chair, wheel, or another stationary object for stability. Sit up nice and tall with the arm extended down at your side, palm facing in. Keeping the upper body stationary,
take a deep breath in and exhale as you extend the arm out to the side, slightly in front of the body, and raise to shoulder level. Keep a slight bend in the elbow, the hand in line with the arm. Do not use jerking or swinging motions. Inhale as you reverse the direction and allow the arm to slowly go back down to the starting position. Repeat with the opposite arm. This exercise can also be performed with the elbows bent 90 degrees. Performing this exercise with the thumb pointed down will engage the supraspinatus muscle which is part of the rotator cuff that provides the shoulder with stability.

**Medial deltoid shoulder abduction:** Can be performed with two dumbbells at the same time. Hold the dumbbells at your side with your elbows bent 90 degrees. Raise your elbows slowly until they are even with your shoulders. Then lower your elbows back down to your side slowly.

**External rotation shoulder abduction:** Start with your arm hanging down by your side. Lift your arm up to shoulder level keeping in line with the side of your leg with your thumb pointing up.

**Supraspinatus shoulder abduction:** Start with your arm hanging down by your side. Starting with a much lighter weight, lift up your arm to shoulder level keeping in line with the side of your leg with your thumb pointing down. This strengthens an important rotator cuff muscle that will help stabilize your shoulder.
Shoulder Adduction
Muscles: Pectoralis Major

Grip the ends of the Flex Bar with both hands. Hold the Flex Bar chest high, elbows out to the sides. Take a deep breath in, exhale and bend the Flex Bar down moving the elbows toward the body. Inhale as you raise elbows back up to the starting position.

Upright Row
Muscles: Deltoids, Trapezius, Biceps Brachii

Start with your arms down at either side in front of you, palms facing back. Use a strap to support your upper body if needed. Exhale and bend your elbows to bring your hands up to your armpits. Keep your hands close to the body through the motion. Inhale and slowly lower to the starting position.

Note: Individuals with a complete injury at or above the C6 level may not be able to perform this movement.

Bicep Curl
Caution: Lateral or Forward Instability

Muscles: Biceps Brachii, Brachioradialis, Brachialis

Start with one arm extended at your side, palm facing up, grasping the dumbbell. If needed, remove the side guard or arm support of your wheelchair or transfer onto a bench in order to perform the movement with a full range of motion. Keeping the upper arm and upper body stationary, take a deep breath in. Exhale and flex the elbow, raising the forearm towards the shoulder. Do not jerk or swing the dumbbell upward. Inhale as you reverse the direction, slowly extending the weight back to the starting position.
Lean toward the opposite side of your wheelchair to increase your lateral stability as well. If possible, you can hold onto the wheelchair frame or wheel on the opposite side for stability. It may also be possible to hold onto a handrail or another piece of fitness equipment to assist with your lateral stability. Repeat with the opposite arm.

Correct Lateral Stability

Correct Forward Stability

**Bicep Curl**
Muscles: Triceps Brachii

Place the hand you are not lifting with on the chair, wheel, or another stationary object for stability and to allow you to slightly lean forward. With one hand grasping the hand grip of the free weight or cable resistance, move the elbow behind the midline of the body, keeping the arm at 90 degrees. Take a deep breath in. Exhale and flex the elbow and inhale as you return the forearm to the starting position. Repeat with the opposite arm.

External Rotation Row and Bent Over Row

*Caution: Lateral or Forward Instability*
Muscles: Trapezius, Posterior Deltoid

For wheelchair users, the most effective row can be performed on a weight bench or by leaning forward on your thighs if you have the core strength.
External Rotation Row

With the elbow raised even with the shoulder as shown on the right, raise the hand forward until the hand is level with the shoulder.

Bent Over Row

Starting with the arms extended fully down toward the floor, pull your elbows up and back pinching your shoulder blades together as shown on the right. If you have the core strength, you can also lean forward with your chest on your lower legs to perform this exercise.

Reclined Pectoral Fly

*Caution: Lateral Instability*

Muscles: Pectoralis Major

Transfer to a bench or raised mat area. Lie on your back, keeping the spine neutral and your head remaining on the surface. A strap around the legs above the knees may be used to keep the legs positioned correctly when lying back on the surface. You may need an assistant to hand you the dumbbells after you are positioned correctly. With weights in your hands and arms extended out to the sides, exhale and bring both arms together over your chest. Keep a consistent slight bend in the elbow throughout the motion and do not jerk or swing the weight up. If you cannot maintain your arms in the same extended, slightly bent position throughout the movement, a lower weight should be used. Inhale as you slowly allow your arms to return to the starting position. A strap around the legs, below or above the knees, may be used.
Lying Abdominal Crunches
Caution: Lateral Instability
Muscles: Rectus Abdominus, Transverse Abdominus

Position yourself facing up, on a flat or declined bench, or a flat mat. If possible, bend knees while keeping feet flat on the floor. A strap around the legs above the knees may be used to keep the legs positioned correctly when lying back on the bench. An additional strap can be used to secure the feet to the surface or have a spotter assist by holding the feet down. While lying down with shoulder blades and neck in alignment with the body, exhale and curl up. Allow shoulder blades to come up off the surface and keep your eyes focused on the ceiling directly overhead. Inhale as you slowly return to the starting position, allowing shoulder blades to return to the surface.

Note: For individuals with a spinal cord injury, this exercise can be performed using a counter-weight such as a medicine ball thrown over head or resistance band positioned around a secure object.

Sources:


Online Interactive Health Program:

**NCHPAD’s 14 – Week Program** *(https://www.nchpad.org/14weeks/)*  
A free, personalized, web-based physical activity and nutrition program for people with mobility limitations, chronic health conditions and physical disabilities. The goal is to help you get moving and make healthy nutrition choices.

The program designs a personal exercise plan for just for you, to best suit your needs. Each week the exercises change to effectively build you strength and endurance. Also included are nutrition tips, recipes, tracking ability with reminders, and access to coaches.

**Activity Planner** *(https://health.gov/MoveYourWay/Activity-Planner/):*  
Ready to get more active this week? Make a plan to stay on track. Set your own weekly goals, choose the activities you want to do, and get personalized tips to help you stay motivated. When you’re done, print your plan or share it with friends and family.
Apps:


This app uses the GPS location services on your iPhone to help you determine how many Calories you burn while exercising in a manual wheelchair. It is designed for outdoor exercise.

**Map my Walk** ([https://www.mapmywalk.com/app](https://www.mapmywalk.com/app))

MapMyWalk uses GPS technology to provide walkers the ability to map, record and share workouts. Set goals and track your progress with detailed performance charts and online training tools. Find popular walking trails near you with a searchable database of over 70 million local routes. Users can also Import workouts from 400+ compatible devices, including Garmin, Polar, Jawbone and Fitbit.

**Sworkit** ([https://sworkit.com/](https://sworkit.com/))

Creates circuit training workouts that don't require any equipment. Just choose your workout type (strength training, cardio, yoga, stretching or custom) and duration (5 to 60 minutes) and Sworkit guides you through the exercises with proper timing, rests, and transitions. You can even create personalized workouts to meet your needs.
Books, DVDs, and Online Videos:

**Book: Zero Assistance Resistance Training: 100% wheelchair-based workout program**

This 12-week fitness program works your whole upper body and cardiovascular system using dumbbells, plates, adjustable cable racks and resistance bands – in your chair, independently. The ZART program • boosts your independence and fitness • raises your metabolism to promote fat loss • improves your cardiovascular health • increases you hand speed (ideal for wheelchair sports) • boosts your body’s ability to adapt and repair itself plus avoid injury • offers nutrition and supplement advice.

**DVD: Beyond Disability: A Yoga Practice with Matthew Sanford**

Made possible in part by the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, this 50-minute DVD allows persons of all abilities to achieve the proven benefits of yoga at home, while seated. Author and recognized health innovator Matthew Sanford takes you through a complete adaptive yoga class. Matthew guides you through each section in an easy to follow manner while students with spinal cord injuries demonstrate.

**Book: Accessible Yoga: Poses and Practices for Every Body**

Yoga practice has so much to offer us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. But many of us feel discouraged to practice because we see young, slim, flexible, well, and able-bodied people dominating yoga spaces. Yet, yoga is truly a practice for all--conferring enormous benefits to our overall well-being as our bodies change, age, and navigate various health challenges. *Accessible Yoga* offers a simple, clear, and adaptable. In this book, Heyman breaks down complex yoga poses, breathing practices, meditation techniques, and yoga teachings into clearly understandable and practical tools we can use every day, regardless of our limitations or challenges.
**DVD: Chair Aerobics for Everyone: Wheelchair Workout**

Wheelchair Workout, from the Chair Aerobics For Everyone series is a fun, easy, motivational workout for all ages. This video is designed for people in wheelchairs that would like to incorporate exercise into their daily routine. You will learn to combine basic stretching with an upper body toning work out to increase strength, flexibility, and muscle-tone. Doing these exercises regularly will help increase mobility and self-esteem while helping to control weight and aiding in digestion.

**DVD: Wheel-Fit Level 1 - NTSC - High energy seated aerobics**

This unique workout presented by disability instructor Kris Saunders-Stowe provides two levels of energetic seated aerobic workout (beginner and progressive), a dumbbell workout and finishes with a flexibility section. Wheel-Fit is designed to be demanding but fun, working on upper body mobility, flexibility, posture, and strength whilst putting the body through a good cardiovascular workout. It is also suitable for able bodied clients who want a different type of workout or who wish to improve their upper body fitness. The moves are fully explained to give you a complete understanding before beginning.

**YouTube Video: Disability Gym Workout (https://youtu.be/S9vQZ79r1CQ)**

An instruction video to show those with a disability how they can exercise in a regular gym. Rob is a wheelchair user with a spinal cord injury. He shows you which equipment you can use and demonstrates how to perform a variety of exercises using free weights, weight machines, cable and pulley machine and the TRX system.

This is another great workout that you can do at your desk - with only a chair and a resistance band.

You Tube Video: **Get Moving at Home** ([https://youtu.be/PGhM1r_guNI](https://youtu.be/PGhM1r_guNI))

Get moving from wherever you are with this 25-minute seated workout. This video will guide you through several strength and cardio activities to increase your heart rate and help you meet your physical activity goals.

You Tube Video: **Exercising at Home: Strength and Cardio (Standing Workout)** ([https://youtu.be/eLCIKvN9Qag](https://youtu.be/eLCIKvN9Qag)) Get moving from wherever you are with this 25 minute standing workout. This video will guide you through several strength and cardio activities to increase your heart rate and help you meet your physical activity goals.
Online Peer Support Networks:

**YOOCAN** The global collaborative community for and by people with disabilities. Sharing experiences and knowledge, so no one feels alone. Get exercise and wellness tips from other people with disabilities. Shop for assistive technology devices.

**SPINALpedia** is a social mentoring network and video archive that allows the spinal cord injury community to motivate each other with the knowledge and triumphs gained from our individual experiences.

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