

# Correlation of newer inflammatory markers in patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus: A cross-sectional study



Swetha Akkina<sup>1</sup>, Srikanth Akula<sup>2</sup>, Rajeev Gandham<sup>3</sup>, Preethi Batakala<sup>4</sup>, Bhagalakshmi Atla<sup>5</sup>, Divija Reddy Bonthu<sup>6</sup>, Sunkara Uha Priya<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Associate Professor, <sup>6,7</sup>Postgraduate Resident, Department of General Medicine, <sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, <sup>4</sup>Professor and Head, Department of Biochemistry, <sup>5</sup>Professor and Head, Department of Pathology, NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Globally, diabetes mellitus (DM) is a major health concerns and has reached alarming levels. DM is a group of metabolic disorders characterized by hyperglycemia leading to micro- and macro-vascular complications. Chronic low-grade inflammation is associated with the pathophysiology of DM. **Aims and Objectives:** The present study aimed to assess the levels of neutrophil-to lymphocyte ratio (NLR), platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio (PLR), systemic immune-inflammation index (SII), systemic inflammation response index (SIRI), and other inflammatory markers in T2DM patients and their correlation with blood sugar and HbA1c. **Materials and Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted in Department of Biochemistry in association with Department of General Medicine and Pathology, NRI Institute of Medical Sciences (NRIIMS), Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. In this study, 90 T2DM patients and 90 non-diabetic subjects were recruited. Fasting and post-prandial blood samples were collected and used for the estimation of blood sugar, urea, creatinine, and lipid profile parameters. Whole blood (EDTA) samples were used for analysis of complete blood count (CBC) and HbA1c. NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, MHR, NHR, LHR, and PHR were calculated from CBC values. Demographic details were collected. **Results:** In this study, significant increase in blood pressure (systolic  $120.4 \pm 8.1$  mmHg), diastolic  $[80.2 \pm 4.8$  mmHg]), fasting blood sugar (FBS) ( $162.5 \pm 53.7$  mg/dL), post-prandial blood sugar ( $238.3 \pm 78.8$  mg/dL), HbA1c ( $8.5 \pm 2.2\%$ ), urea ( $28.6 \pm 8.6$  mg/dL), creatinine ( $1.1 \pm 0.2$  mg/dL), total cholesterol ( $186.8 \pm 46.1$  mg/dL), triglycerides ( $168.9 \pm 61.2$  mg/dL), LDLC ( $115.0 \pm 36.3$  mg/dL), VLDL ( $33.8 \pm 12.4$  mg/dL), and neutrophil count ( $66.6 \pm 11.4\%$ ) was observed in T2DM cases. Inflammatory markers such as NLR ( $4.2 \pm 1.1$ ), PLR ( $0.17 \pm 0.01$ ), SII ( $12.6 \pm 3.6$ ), SIRI ( $25.7 \pm 5.2$ ), MHR ( $0.15 \pm 0.08$ ), NHR ( $1.9 \pm 0.72$ ), and PHR ( $0.07 \pm 0.02$ ) were significantly increased in T2DM cases than non-diabetic subjects. FBS was positively correlated with SIRI ( $r=0.180$ ), MHR ( $r=0.257$ ), NHR ( $r=0.418$ ), and PHR ( $r=0.212$ ). Similarly, HbA1c positively correlated with NHR ( $r=0.353$ ) and PHR ( $r=0.177$ ) in T2DM subjects. In this study, HDLC level and lymphocyte count was significantly decreased in T2DM cases. **Conclusion:** The study may conclude that increased levels of NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, MHR, NHR, and PHR in T2DM and their positive correlation with blood sugar and HbA1c may serve as alternate markers of inflammation and are useful to assess the impact of systemic inflammatory response in T2DM patients.

**Key words:** Neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio; Platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio; Systemic immune inflammation index; Systemic inflammation response index

### Address for Correspondence:

Dr. Rajeev Gandham, Department of Biochemistry, NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.  
Mobile: +91-8892551401. E-mail: gandhamrajeev33@gmail.com

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, diabetes mellitus (DM) is a major health concern and has reached alarming levels. DM is a group of metabolic disorders characterized by hyperglycemia leading to micro- and macrovascular complications. In 2021, it is estimated that 537 million people have diabetes, and this number is projected to increase 643 million by 2030 and 783 million by 2045. In India, the prevalence of DM is 77 million in 2019, projected to increase 134 million by 2045. The reported prevalence of diabetes in Andhra Pradesh is 8.4%. Population aging, urbanization, sedentary lifestyle, and unhealthy dietary habits are proposed to be the major contributing factors for this increasing prevalence.<sup>1,2</sup>

Chronic low-grade inflammation is associated with the pathophysiology of DM and inflammatory markers may lead to insulin resistance (IR) by inhibiting  $\beta$ -cell function and by accelerating apoptosis.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, monitoring of blood glucose levels in the early stage can delay the onset of diabetic vascular complications. Patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) are more prone to developing cardiovascular diseases. Chronic low-grade inflammation due to IR may lead to cardiac and other vascular complications of diabetes. Inflammatory markers such as CRP (C-reactive protein), total white blood cell count, interleukin (IL)-6, IL-1, IL-18, and tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  (TNF- $\alpha$ ) are well established. However, these markers are not done routinely due to their cost and technical difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, neutrophil-lymphocyte ratio (NLR) has been proposed as a novel biomarker for inflammation in diabetic kidney disease, heart failure, and SARS-COV-2 infection.<sup>5-7</sup> Neutrophils are concerned with the release of inflammatory mediators that can cause vascular wall degeneration, whereas lymphocytes are involved in the regulation of inflammatory response and thus play a role as an anti-atherosclerotic. Therefore, the ratio of neutrophil to lymphocyte may serve as a surrogate marker for inflammation.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio (PLR) has also been reported as a novel biomarker for inflammation in liver diseases and cancer.<sup>9,10</sup> PLR indicates increased platelet count that leads to platelet aggregation and thus promotes vascular complications and decreased lymphocytes, suggestive of inflammation. Recently, systemic immune-inflammatory index (SII) and systemic inflammatory response index (SIRI) have been proposed as a complete blood count (CBC) derived inflammatory markers, and the levels were reported in coronary artery disease (CAD) and malignancies.<sup>11,12</sup>

Furthermore, new inflammatory markers are calculated from CBC values related to HDL-C, which includes monocyte/HDL-C ratio (MHR), neutrophil/HDL-C ratio (NHR), lymphocyte/HDL-C ratio (LHR), and platelet/HDL-C ratio (PHR). A few studies have reported their role in stroke, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetic kidney disease.<sup>13-15</sup>

Although NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, and other CBC-derived inflammatory markers have been proposed as novel biomarkers in various conditions, there are limited studies available on the use of these markers in DM. In addition, this study included all the CBC-derived inflammatory and their correlation with blood sugar and HbA1c.

### Aims and objectives

The present study aimed to assess the levels of NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, and other inflammatory markers in T2DM patients and their correlation with blood sugar and HbA1c.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted in the Department of Biochemistry in association with Department of General Medicine and Pathology, NRIIMS, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. After obtaining the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC/NRI/114/2024) and informed consent from all the study subjects, a total of 180 subjects were recruited into the study using simple random sampling method. Out of 180, T2DM patients were 90 and non-diabetic subjects were 90. Sample size was calculated with a power of 80% and with type I error of 5% using the formula:  $[Z1-\alpha/2]^2 [b] [1-b]/d^{23}$

### Inclusion criteria

Diabetic and non-diabetic subjects willing to participate in the study, age of  $\geq 18$  years, both male and females were included. T2DM was diagnosed based on the American Diabetes Association criteria.

### Exclusion criteria

Patients refused to participate in the study, patients with immunosuppressive therapy, autoimmune diseases, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes other than T2DM, liver diseases, renal diseases, thyroid diseases, gestational diabetics, epilepsy, hypertensive encephalopathy, malignancy conditions, and pregnant women were excluded from the study.

### Sample collection

Under aseptic conditions, after 8–12 h fasting, 5 mL of venous blood samples and 2 mL post-prandial samples were collected from all study subjects, visiting to Department of General Medicine. The collected blood samples were

allowed to stand for 1 h and centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 10 min to separate serum sample. The obtained serum sample was used for the estimation of fasting and post-prandial glucose by GOD-POD, urea (urease), creatinine (Jaffe's), total cholesterol (cholesterol oxidase/peroxidase), triglycerides (glycerol phosphate oxidase/peroxidase), and HDLC (HDLC-Direct) were estimated using Biosystems BA-200 Biochemistry fully autoanalyzer. LDLC and VLDLC were calculated by Friedewald's formula. EDTA samples were used for the measurement of HbA1c using BIORAD D-10 analyzer and CBC using Mindray BC 780 Hematology analyzer. NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, MHR, NHR, LHR, and PHR were calculated from CBC values using the following formulas.

NLR=Neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio

PLR=Platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio

SII=Platelet  $\times$  Neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio

SIRI=Monocyte  $\times$  Neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio

MHR=Monocyte-to-HDLC ratio

NHR=Neutrophil-to-HDLC ratio

LHR=Lymphocytes-to-HDLC ratio

PHR=Platelets-to-HDLC ratio

Detailed physical and clinical examination was done for all the study subjects. Body mass index was calculated and blood pressure was measured in addition to the family history and lifestyle parameters.

### Statistical analysis

The data were represented in mean and standard deviation and categorical data were expressed in percentages. The difference observed if any in quantitative measurement was tested by applying Mann–Whitney U test. Spearman's rho correlation was applied to correlate inflammatory markers with blood sugar and HbA1c. The P value ( $P < 0.05$ ) was considered as statistically significant. Data analysis was done using SPSS 22.0.

## RESULTS

In the present study, among T2DM subjects males were 48 (53.3%) and females were 42 (46.7%). In non-diabetic subjects, males were 49 (54.5%) and females were 41 (45.5%). In this study, mean age ( $56.9 \pm 10.4$  years) was significantly high in T2DM cases than non-diabetics. Significant increase in systolic blood pressure ( $120.4 \pm 8.1$  mmHg), diastolic blood pressure ( $80.2 \pm 4.8$  mmHg), FBS ( $162.5 \pm 53.7$  mg/dL), post-prandial blood sugar ( $238.3 \pm 78.8$  mg/dL), HbA1c ( $8.5 \pm 2.2\%$ ), urea ( $28.6 \pm 8.6$  mg/dL), creatinine ( $1.1 \pm 0.2$  mg/dL), total cholesterol ( $186.8 \pm 46.1$  mg/dL), triglycerides ( $168.9 \pm 61.2$  mg/dL), LDLC ( $115.0 \pm 36.3$  mg/dL), VLDL

( $33.8 \pm 12.4$  mg/dL), and neutrophil count ( $66.6 \pm 11.4\%$ ) was observed in T2DM cases than non-diabetic subjects. Significant decrease in HDLC and lymphocytes was observed in T2DM subjects as shown in Table 1.

In the current study, inflammatory markers such as NLR ( $4.2 \pm 1.1$ ), PLR ( $0.17 \pm 0.01$ ), SII ( $12.6 \pm 3.6$ ), SIRI ( $25.7 \pm 5.2$ ), MHR ( $0.15 \pm 0.08$ ), NHR ( $1.9 \pm 0.72$ ), and PHR ( $0.07 \pm 0.02$ ) were significantly increased in T2DM cases than non-diabetic subjects, LHR statistically not significant as shown in Table 2.

In this study, FBS was significantly correlated (positive) with SIRI ( $r=0.180$ ), MHR ( $r=0.257$ ), NHR ( $r=0.418$ ), MHR ( $r=0.257$ ), and PHR ( $r=0.212$ ). Similarly, HbA1c positively correlated with NHR ( $r=0.353$ ) and PHR ( $r=0.177$ ). Other inflammatory markers also showed positive correlation but not reached statistical significance (Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

DM is a complex and multifactorial disease associated with IR, oxidative stress, and inflammation. Chronic inflammation plays an important role in the initiation and progression of T2DM and further accelerates micro- and macrovascular complications. Accelerated inflammation and elevated immune response can lead to the upregulation of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines, such as IL-1 $\beta$ , TNF- $\alpha$ , and vascular endothelial growth factor, which can cause endothelial dysfunction and leukocyte infiltration.<sup>16</sup>

In this study, significant elevation of inflammatory markers such as NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, MHR, NHR, and PHR was observed in T2DM cases compared to non-diabetic controls. Inflammatory markers showed positive correlation with blood sugar and HbA1c. Neutrophils are associated with inflammation, whereas lymphocytes indicate immunoregulation. These can indicate the systemic inflammation and also innate and adaptive immuneresponses. Inflammation caused by hyperglycemia may cause changes in the peripheral blood cell levels.<sup>17</sup> Previous studies have evidenced that peripheral blood leukocytes and their subgroups are associated with micro and macrovascular complications in T2DM patients.<sup>18,19</sup> More specifically, peripheral blood leukocytes include neutrophils, lymphocytes, monocytes, eosinophils, and basophils, each type of which holds a unique biological function in systemic inflammation.<sup>20</sup>

In this study, increased NLR may be a manifestation of an increased number of neutrophils, which adhere to the endothelial cell, leading to vascular endothelial cell damage

**Table 1: Comparison of demographic details, biochemical, and hematological parameters in T2DM patients and non-diabetic subjects**

| Parameters                           | T2DM cases<br>(Mean±SD) (n=90) | Non-diabetic subjects<br>(Mean±SD) (n=90) | P-value |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---------|
| <b>Demographic Details</b>           |                                |   |         |
| Age (years)                          | 56.9±10.4                      | 49.7±12.8                                 | 0.000*  |
| Males (n,%)                          | 53.3                           | 54.5                                      | -       |
| Females (n,%)                        | 46.7                           | 45.5                                      | -       |
| Body mass index (kg/m <sup>2</sup> ) | 25.1±2.6                       | 22.9±1.3                                  | 0.000*  |
| Systolic blood pressure (mmHg)       | 120.4±8.1                      | 116.3±4.8                                 | 0.001*  |
| Diastolic blood pressure (mmHg)      | 80.2±4.8                       | 70.1±3.2                                  | 0.047*  |
| <b>Biochemical parameters</b>        |                                |   |         |
| Fasting blood sugar (mg/dL)          | 162.5±53.7                     | 91.8±10.4                                 | 0.000*  |
| Post-prandial blood sugar (mg/dL)    | 238.3±78.8                     | 127.3±21.2                                | 0.000*  |
| HbA1c                                | 8.5±2.2                        | 5.3±0.26                                  | 0.000*  |
| Serum urea                           | 28.6±8.6                       | 21.5±7.8                                  | 0.000*  |
| Serum creatinine                     | 1.1±0.2                        | 0.8±0.2                                   | 0.000*  |
| Serum total cholesterol              | 186.8±46.1                     | 153.0±20.9                                | 0.000*  |
| Serum triglycerides                  | 168.9±61.2                     | 142.8±40.1                                | 0.028*  |
| Serum HDLC                           | 38.2±10.2                      | 47.3±8.8                                  | 0.000*  |
| Serum LDLC                           | 115.0±36.3                     | 77.3±18.1                                 | 0.000*  |
| Serum VLDL                           | 33.8±12.4                      | 28.4±7.9                                  | 0.020*  |
| <b>Hematological parameters</b>      |                                |   |         |
| Hemoglobin (%)                       | 11.2±1.9                       | 11.5±2.3                                  | 0.733   |
| Packed cell volume                   | 31.9±4.5                       | 33.8±4.9                                  | 0.008*  |
| White blood cell count               | 8970.±2472.5                   | 8362.4±2352.4                             | 0.190   |
| Platelets                            | 2.8±0.68                       | 2.8±0.55                                  | 0.900   |
| Neutrophils (%)                      | 66.6±11.4                      | 60.4±10.1                                 | 0.004*  |
| Lymphocytes (%)                      | 24.1±10.9                      | 29.4±8.8                                  | 0.006*  |
| Monocytes (%)                        | 5.6±2.7                        | 5.4±1.9                                   | 0.951   |

\*Significant (P&lt;0.05). SD: Standard deviation

**Table 2: Comparison of inflammatory markers in T2DM patients and non-diabetic subjects**

| Parameters                                  | T2DM cases<br>(Mean±SD) (n=90) | Non-diabetic subjects<br>(Mean±SD) (n=90) | P-value |
|---|--------------------------------|---|---------|
| Neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (NLR)        | 4.2±1.1                        | 2.3±1.0                                   | 0.009*  |
| Platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio (PLR)          | 0.17±0.01                      | 0.10±0.04                                 | 0.046*  |
| systemic immune inflammation index (SII)    | 12.6±3.6                       | 6.7±3.7                                   | 0.028*  |
| Systemic inflammation response index (SIRI) | 25.7±5.2                       | 12.4±7.0                                  | 0.006*  |
| Monocyte-to-HDLC ratio (MHR)                | 0.15±0.08                      | 0.12±0.05                                 | 0.002*  |
| Neutrophil-to-HDLC ratio (NHR)              | 1.9±0.72                       | 1.3±0.27                                  | 0.000*  |
| Lymphocyte-to-HDLC ratio (LHR)              | 0.66±0.32                      | 0.64±0.24                                 | 0.807   |
| Platelet-to-HDLC ratio (PHR)                | 0.07±0.02                      | 0.06±0.01                                 | 0.000*  |

\*Significant, (P&lt;0.05). SD: Standard deviation

**Table 3: Correlation of inflammatory markers with FBS and HbA1c**

| Parameters                           | FBS     |         | HbA1c   |         |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                      | r-value | P-value | r-value | P-value |
| Neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio       | 0.133   | 0.120   | 0.154   | 0.072   |
| Platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio         | 0.066   | 0.442   | 0.044   | 0.607   |
| Systemic immune inflammation index   | 0.106   | 0.217   | 0.083   | 0.335   |
| Systemic inflammation response index | 0.180*  | 0.034   | 0.127   | 0.136   |
| Monocyte-to-HDLC ratio               | 0.257** | 0.002   | 0.147   | 0.086   |
| Neutrophil-to-HDLC ratio             | 0.418** | 0.000   | 0.353** | 0.000   |
| Lymphocyte-to-HDLC ratio             | 0.095   | 0.268   | 0.044   | 0.611   |
| Platelet-to-HDLC ratio               | 0.212*  | 0.013   | 0.177*  | 0.037   |

FBS: Fasting blood sugar

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

and in turn causing extensive chronic inflammation.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the elevated NLR might indicate increased microvascular inflammation in patients with T2DM. Lymphocytes serve as a major part of the body's immuneresponse. They are involved in the regulation of inflammatory responses and have a relatively higher proportion of CD4 T cells that were proved to be anti-atherosclerotic.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, PLR is significantly increased in T2DM patients. Studies have reported the role of PLR in predicting diabetes-associated lower limb vascular disease, atherosclerosis, and diabetic foot ulcers.<sup>23,24</sup> It has been well documented that platelets participate in thrombosis. Many studies have reported that platelets play a significant role in the immuno-inflammatory response. Specifically, platelets can release a variety of immune-regulating cytokines, chemokines, and other mediators, thus regulating the inflammation response in blood vessels in an autocrine or paracrine manner.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, platelets could also regulate neutrophils, endothelial cells, and lymph directly, allowing them to recruit toward injured tissue. Therefore, because of this regulatory function of platelets, elevated PLR might indicate the relatively active inflammatory response of platelets among T2DM patients.<sup>26</sup>

The SII and SIRI are proposed as novel CBC-derived inflammatory markers. Studies have reported the association between SII, SIRI, and diabetic complications.<sup>15,27</sup> The association between SII and diabetic vascular complications is unsurprising given some of the mechanisms underlying the development of diabetes and its complications. Inflammation and immune response play important roles in the pathophysiology and progression of diabetes. Especially, chronic low-grade inflammation contributes to organ dysfunction and tissue damage, which can promote IR and impaired insulin secretion.<sup>28</sup> Our results are in accordance with the studies conducted by Mann<sup>29</sup> and Yang et al.,<sup>30</sup>. In addition, Elbeyli et al., reported that increased SII was strongly associated with the development of diabetic macular edema.<sup>31</sup> In 2022, a study conducted by Guo et al., reported that elevated SII was associated with diabetic kidney disease.<sup>15</sup> In 2023 Lin et al., reported that elevated SIRI has been independently associated with the risk of diabetic CVDs.<sup>32</sup>

MHR is reported to be a novel biomarker with integration of pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory indices. Monocytes play a significant role in the development of diabetic vascular complications. Monocyte counts have been shown to be correlated with IR, T2DM, and vascular complications.<sup>18,33</sup> On the other hand, emerging data indicate that reduced HDL-C is an important contributor to accelerate atherosclerosis in diabetic patients. Therefore, the integrated maker, MHR, may serve as better marker to

indicate vascular inflammatory changes in diabetic patients. In addition to the above inflammatory markers, NHR and PHR were also significantly elevated in T2DM patients.

### Limitations of the study

The present study has the following limitations. (1) Sample size and (2) established inflammatory markers such as CRP and IL-6 were not assessed.

## CONCLUSION

The study may conclude that increased levels of NLR, PLR, SII, SIRI, MHR, NHR, and PHR in T2DM and their positive correlation with blood sugar and HbA1c may serve as alternate markers of inflammation. These markers are easily calculated from CBC values and are less expensive. Therefore, these simple and inexpensive markers are useful to assess the impact of systemic inflammatory response in T2DM patients. Further, studies are recommended with large sample size.

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**SA-** Definition of intellectual content, Data collection, data analysis, concept, design, clinical protocol, literature survey, implementation of study protocol;  
**SA-** Data collection, data analysis, concept, design, clinical protocol, implementation of study protocol; **RG-** Prepared first draft of manuscript, data analysis, statistical analysis and Interpretation, manuscript preparation and submission of article, coordination and Manuscript revision; **PB-** Review manuscript;  
**BA-** Review Manuscript; **DRB-** Design, clinical protocol, Literature survey, data collection, data analysis; **SUP-** Design, clinical protocol, Literature survey, data collection, data analysis.

**Work attributed to:**

NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Sangivalasa, Visakhapatnam - 531 162, Andhra Pradesh, India.

**Orcid ID:**

Dr. Swetha Akkina - <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8097-0331>

Dr. Srikanth Akula - <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3386-6259>

Dr. Rajeev Gandham - <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5288-486X>

Dr. Preethi Batakala - <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8690-8814>

Dr. Bhagyalakshmi Atla - <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0606-7301>

Dr. Divija Reddy Bonthu - <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9108-9829>

Dr. Sunkara Uha Priya - <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5286-9891>

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