



Asthma – An Analysis

Dr. Anand Paramathma*

CAO, My RMC Solutions Private Limited, B4:06-IIT Madras Research Park, Kanagam Road, Tharamani, Chennai – 600113

ABSTRACT

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that affects millions of people worldwide, causing breathing difficulties and often requiring long-term treatment. This research paper analyzes the prevalence, risk factors, and management of asthma, using a systematic review of existing literature. The paper also explores the impact of asthma on patients' quality of life, causes, symptoms, and treatments of asthma, exploring the different types of asthma, such as exercise-induced asthma and occupational asthma, and also its healthcare costs. The research finds that asthma is a significant public health problem, affecting around 339 million people globally, with higher rates in low- and middle-income countries. Several risk factors have been identified, including genetic predisposition, environmental exposures, and lifestyle factors such as smoking. Effective management strategies include avoiding triggers, using a medication, and regular monitoring of symptoms. The research also highlights the impact of asthma on patients' quality of life, including limitations in physical activity, work productivity, and social interactions. Asthma also imposes a significant economic burden, with direct and indirect costs estimated at \$80 billion globally. The research concludes by highlighting the need for further research into the pathophysiology and management of asthma, as well as efforts to improve access to care for patients worldwide. Additionally, addressing environmental risk factors such as air pollution, tobacco use, and occupational exposures can reduce the incidence and burden of asthma. Overall, this analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on asthma, emphasizing the importance of effective prevention and management strategies to improve the lives of millions of people affected by this chronic disease.

Keywords: Asthma, risk factors, triggers, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, management, prevention, , healthcare costs, quality of life

1. Introduction

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that affects the airways in the lungs. People with asthma experience inflammation and narrowing of the airways, which makes it difficult to breathe. This narrowing can occur spontaneously or in response to certain triggers such as allergens, irritants, exercise, and infections. The symptoms of asthma include wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. These symptoms can range from mild to severe and may occur occasionally or frequently, depending on the individual's condition. Asthma is a treatable condition, but there is no cure. Treatment typically involves the use of medications, such as bronchodilators and corticosteroids, to manage symptoms and prevent flare-ups. People with asthma can also take steps to reduce their exposure to triggers and improve their overall respiratory health through lifestyle changes and other interventions.

1.1 Statistics and prevalence of asthma in India

Asthma is a significant public health issue in India, affecting a substantial proportion of the population. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), an estimated 15-20 million people in India have asthma. The prevalence of asthma in India varies by region and population group. Studies suggest that the prevalence of asthma is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas, and in children compared to adults. The prevalence of asthma is also higher in people who have a family history of the disease, who are exposed to environmental factors such as air pollution, and who have co-morbid conditions such as allergies and respiratory infections. A national survey conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2017-2018 estimated the prevalence of self-reported asthma in India to be 2.5%. However, this figure may underestimate the true burden of the disease as many people with asthma may not have been diagnosed or may not report their symptoms.

People with a family history of asthma or allergies are more likely to develop asthma themselves. It is thought to involve a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Exposure to certain environmental factors such as air pollution, tobacco smoke, and allergens can also increase the risk of developing asthma. In addition, certain respiratory infections, stress, and other factors may trigger asthma symptoms in susceptible individuals. Asthma is caused by inflammation and narrowing of the airways in the lungs. This narrowing can occur spontaneously or in response to triggers such as allergens, irritants, and respiratory infections. The inflammation in the airways can cause the production of excess mucus, which further obstructs the airways and makes breathing more difficult.

2. Context

2.1 Causes of Asthma

Asthma is a complex disease, and its exact causes are not fully understood. However, it is thought to result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Genetics: Asthma tends to run in families, suggesting a genetic component to the disease. Research has identified specific genes that are associated with an increased risk of developing asthma.

Environmental factors: Exposure to various environmental factors can increase the risk of developing asthma or trigger asthma symptoms in people who already have the condition. Some of these factors include:

Allergens: Substances that can cause an allergic reaction, such as pollen, dust mites, animal dander, and mold.

Irritants: Substances that can irritate the airways and trigger asthma symptoms, such as cigarette smoke, air pollution, and strong odors.

Respiratory infections: Viral or bacterial infections of the respiratory tract can trigger asthma symptoms in some people.

Exercise: Exercise-induced asthma is a type of asthma triggered by physical activity.

Occupational exposure: Some people may develop asthma as a result of exposure to certain substances in the workplace, such as chemicals or dust.

Other factors: Other factors that may contribute to the development or exacerbation of asthma include, Obesity, Stress, Acid reflux, Certain medications, such as beta-blockers and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

It is important to note that not everyone who is exposed to these factors will develop asthma, and some people with asthma may not be sensitive to certain triggers. Asthma is a complex disease, and its development and progression may involve a combination of these and other factors.

2.2 Symptoms of Asthma

The symptoms of asthma can range from mild to severe and may occur occasionally or frequently, depending on the individual's condition. The most common symptoms of asthma include:

Wheezing: A high-pitched whistling sound when breathing, especially during exhalation.

Coughing: A persistent cough, especially at night or early in the morning.

Shortness of breath: Difficulty breathing, feeling like you can't catch your breath.

Chest tightness: A feeling of tightness or pressure in the chest.

Other symptoms that may occur during an asthma attack include: Rapid breathing, Difficulty speaking, Blue lips or face (cyanosis), Anxiety or panic, Sweating. These symptoms can range from mild to severe and may occur occasionally or frequently, depending on the individual's condition.

Symptoms of asthma can vary from person to person and may be triggered by various factors such as allergens (e.g., pollen, dust mites), irritants (e.g., smoke, air pollution), exercise, cold air, respiratory infections, and stress. It is important to note that not everyone with asthma will experience all of these symptoms, and some people with asthma may have symptoms that are milder or less frequent than others. If you experience any of these symptoms, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider to determine the best course of treatment.

2.3 Psychological symptoms of Asthma

Asthma is a physical condition that can have a significant impact on a person's psychological well-being. Living with asthma can be stressful and can lead to a range of psychological symptoms, including:

Anxiety: People with asthma may experience anxiety related to their condition, such as worrying about when the next asthma attack will occur or whether their medication is effective.

Depression: Chronic illnesses like asthma can lead to feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable.

Fear: Fear of having an asthma attack or being in a situation where medical help is not available can be a common experience for people with asthma.

Stress: Asthma symptoms and the need to manage the condition can be stressful and can impact a person's overall quality of life.

Social isolation: People with asthma may avoid social situations, such as exercising or going outdoors, out of fear of triggering an asthma attack or embarrassment about their condition.

Poor sleep: Asthma symptoms can make it difficult to sleep, which can lead to fatigue and mood changes.

These psychological symptoms can be significant and can impact a person's overall well-being. It is important for individuals with asthma to work with their healthcare provider to develop a comprehensive treatment plan that addresses both their physical and psychological needs. This may include medications, counseling, and stress-management techniques. By managing their asthma effectively, individuals with asthma can improve their quality of life and reduce the impact of psychological symptoms.

2.4 Stages of Asthma

Asthma can be classified into different stages based on the frequency and severity of symptoms, as well as the level of lung function impairment. The following are the four stages of asthma:

Intermittent asthma: This is the mildest form of asthma, with symptoms occurring less than twice a week, and nighttime symptoms occurring less than twice a month. Lung function is normal between episodes, and there is no interference with daily activities.

Mild persistent asthma: This stage is characterized by symptoms occurring more than twice a week, but less than once a day, and nighttime symptoms occurring more than twice a month. Lung function may be slightly reduced, but there is still no significant interference with daily activities.

Moderate persistent asthma: In this stage, symptoms occur daily, and nighttime symptoms occur more than once a week. Lung function is significantly reduced, and daily activities may be limited.

Severe persistent asthma: This is the most severe form of asthma, with symptoms occurring continuously throughout the day, and nighttime symptoms occurring frequently. Lung function is significantly reduced, and daily activities are severely limited.

It is important to note that the severity of asthma can fluctuate over time, and a person may experience periods of worsening symptoms, called asthma exacerbations or asthma attacks. These exacerbations can be life-threatening and require immediate medical attention. It is essential for individuals with asthma to work closely with their healthcare provider to monitor their symptoms and develop a comprehensive treatment plan that addresses their specific needs. With proper management, many people with asthma are able to control their symptoms and live active, healthy lives.

2.5 Diagnosis of Asthma

The diagnosis of asthma involves a combination of medical history, physical examination, and lung function tests. Here are the steps involved in diagnosing asthma:

Medical history: A healthcare provider will take a detailed medical history, including symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. They will also ask about any family history of asthma or allergies, as well as any triggers that may exacerbate symptoms.

Physical examination: Your doctor will examine you to look for signs of asthma, such as wheezing or a prolonged exhale to assess lung function and listen for any abnormal breath sounds, such as wheezing.

Pulmonary function tests: These tests measure how much air you can exhale and how quickly you can do it. The two main tests are spirometry and peak flow measurement. Spirometry involves breathing into a machine that measures your lung function, while peak flow measurement involves blowing into a device that measures how fast you can exhale.

Bronchial challenge test: This test involves inhaling a substance that can cause airway constriction, such as methacholine. If the airways are narrow, it is an indication of asthma.

Peak flow measurement: Peak flow measurement is a simple test that measures how fast a person can exhale air. It can be used to monitor changes in lung function and assess the effectiveness of treatment.

Other tests: Your doctor may also order additional tests, such as allergy tests, to identify triggers that may be contributing to your asthma.

Response to treatment: If your doctor suspects that you have asthma, they may prescribe an inhaler or other medication to see if your symptoms improve. If your symptoms improve with treatment, this can help confirm the diagnosis of asthma.

To diagnose asthma, a person must have a history of respiratory symptoms and show evidence of airflow obstruction or airway hyper-responsiveness. Additionally, the symptoms should improve with treatment, such as bronchodilators or corticosteroids. It is important to note that asthma can be difficult to diagnose, and the diagnosis may need to be revisited over time as symptoms and triggers change. Therefore, it is important to work closely with your healthcare provider to monitor your symptoms and adjust your treatment plan as needed.

2.6 Laboratory tests and Imaging studies of Asthma

While there is no definitive laboratory test to diagnose asthma, several tests and imaging studies can aid in the diagnosis and management of the condition. Some of these tests and studies include:

Pulmonary function tests (PFTs): PFTs measure the amount and speed of air that can be exhaled, as well as lung volume and capacity. These tests can help diagnose asthma and monitor lung function over time.

Bronchoprovocation testing: This test involves inhaling a substance that can trigger asthma symptoms, such as methacholine or histamine, and measuring lung function before and after exposure. This test can help diagnose asthma and assess its severity.

Allergy testing: Allergy testing can help determine if a person's asthma symptoms are triggered by allergens, such as dust mites, pollen, or pet dander.

Blood tests: Blood tests can help identify underlying conditions that may contribute to asthma symptoms, such as allergies or infections.

Chest X-ray: A chest X-ray can help identify any structural abnormalities in the lungs or other potential causes of respiratory symptoms.

Computed tomography (CT) scan: A CT scan can provide more detailed images of the lungs and help identify any abnormalities or structural changes that may be contributing to asthma symptoms.

It is important to note that while these tests and studies can provide valuable information, they should be used in conjunction with a comprehensive medical history and physical examination to diagnose and manage asthma effectively. A healthcare provider can work with an individual to determine which tests and studies are necessary based on their specific symptoms and needs.

2.7 Treatment of Asthma

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that requires ongoing management to control symptoms and prevent exacerbations. Treatment for asthma typically involves a combination of medications, lifestyle changes, and avoiding triggers. The specific treatment plan will depend on the severity and frequency of symptoms, as well as individual factors such as age, medical history, and the presence of other health conditions. It is important for people with asthma to work closely with their healthcare provider to develop an individualized treatment plan that meets their specific needs. This may involve regular check-ins to monitor symptoms, adjust medications, and make lifestyle changes as needed. With proper management, many people with asthma are able to live active and healthy lives.

2.8 Medical management and Surgical options for Asthma

Medical management is the primary mode of treatment for asthma. The goal of medical management is to reduce inflammation in the airways, prevent asthma symptoms and exacerbations, and improve lung function. The following are some of the medications used for asthma treatment:

Inhaled bronchodilators: These medications, such as short-acting beta-agonists (SABAs) and long-acting beta-agonists (LABAs), work by relaxing the smooth muscles in the airways and improving airflow. These medications relax the muscles around the airways. They are often taken via inhaler or nebulizer and making it easier to breathe.

Inhaled corticosteroids: These medications reduce inflammation in the airways and are the most effective treatment for long-term control of asthma. They are also taken via inhaler or nebulizer.

Combination inhalers: Some inhalers contain both a bronchodilator and a corticosteroid to provide both immediate relief and long-term control of symptoms.

Oral medications: In some cases, oral medications may be prescribed to manage severe or persistent asthma symptoms. Oral corticosteroids are used for severe asthma attacks and can help reduce inflammation in the airways.

Lifestyle changes: Certain lifestyle changes may help reduce the frequency and severity of asthma, such as avoiding triggers, maintaining a healthy weight, and managing stress.

Immunotherapy: In some cases, allergen immunotherapy (allergy shots) may be recommended to help reduce sensitivity to specific allergens. These medications, such as omalizumab, work by altering the immune system's response to allergens.

Leukotriene modifiers: These medications block the action of leukotrienes, which are chemicals that can cause inflammation in the airways.

Most people with asthma can manage their symptoms effectively with medications and lifestyle modifications. In some cases, surgical options may be considered for severe, treatment-resistant asthma. The following are some surgical options for asthma:

Bronchial thermoplasty: This procedure involves using heat to reduce the amount of smooth muscle in the airways, which can improve airflow and reduce asthma symptoms.

Lung volume reduction surgery: This surgery involves removing damaged or diseased lung tissue to improve lung function and reduce symptoms.

Lung transplant: In severe cases, lung transplant may be considered as a last resort.

2.9 Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Asthma

Alternative and complementary treatments for asthma may include various practices that are not typically used in conventional medicine. While these treatments may be used as a complementary addition to conventional treatment, it is important to note that they should not replace medical treatment for asthma. The following are some alternative and complementary treatments for asthma:

Acupuncture: Acupuncture involves the insertion of thin needles into specific points on the body to help reduce asthma symptoms.

Herbal remedies: Some herbs, such as ginger, licorice root, and turmeric, have been used to help reduce inflammation in the airways and improve lung function.

Breathing exercises: Breathing exercises, such as yoga, tai chi, and qi gong, can help improve breathing and reduce stress, which may trigger asthma symptoms.

Homeopathy: Homeopathy involves the use of highly diluted substances to help reduce asthma symptoms.

Chiropractic: Chiropractic adjustments may help improve lung function and reduce asthma symptoms.

Dietary changes: Some people may find that dietary changes, such as avoiding trigger foods and increasing intake of anti-inflammatory foods, can help reduce asthma symptoms.

Vitamin D supplements: Some studies suggest that vitamin D supplements may help reduce the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms, particularly in individuals with low vitamin D levels.

It is important to consult with a healthcare provider before using alternative and complementary treatments for asthma. Some of these treatments may interact with medications or exacerbate asthma symptoms. A healthcare provider can help determine the safety and effectiveness of these treatments for individual cases of asthma.

2.10 Prevention of Asthma

While there is no known cure for asthma, there are several steps you can take to help prevent asthma symptoms and reduce the frequency and severity of asthma attacks. Here are some tips for preventing asthma:

Identify and avoid triggers: Common triggers of asthma include allergens (e.g., pollen, dust mites), irritants (e.g., smoke, air pollution), exercise, cold air, respiratory infections, and stress. By identifying and avoiding these triggers, you may be able to prevent asthma symptoms from occurring.

Maintain a healthy weight: Obesity has been linked to an increased risk of asthma. Maintaining a healthy weight through a balanced diet and regular exercise may help prevent asthma symptoms.

Get vaccinated: Vaccines such as the flu vaccine and pneumonia vaccine can help prevent respiratory infections, which can trigger asthma symptoms.

Manage allergies: If you have allergies, it is important to work with your healthcare provider to manage them. This may involve allergy medications, immunotherapy (allergy shots), or avoiding allergens.

Take medications as prescribed: If you have been prescribed asthma medications, it is important to take them as directed by your healthcare provider. This can help prevent asthma symptoms and reduce the risk of asthma attacks.

Regular check-ups: Regular check-ups with your healthcare provider can help monitor your asthma and adjust your treatment plan as needed.

By following these steps, you may be able to prevent or reduce the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms. However, it is important to remember that asthma is a chronic disease that requires ongoing management and monitoring, and there may be times when symptoms worsen despite preventative measures. If you experience any changes in your asthma symptoms, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

2.11 Lifestyle changes for Asthma

Lifestyle changes and diet and nutrition can play an important role in managing asthma symptoms. The following are some lifestyle changes and dietary recommendations for asthma:

Exercise regularly: Regular exercise can help improve lung function and reduce asthma symptoms. It is important to consult with a healthcare provider before starting an exercise program.

Manage stress: Stress can trigger asthma symptoms, so it is important to manage stress through relaxation techniques, such as meditation, yoga, or deep breathing.

Follow a balanced diet: A balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats can help reduce inflammation and improve overall health.

Stay hydrated: Drinking plenty of water can help keep airways hydrated and reduce mucus buildup.

Work with a healthcare provider: A healthcare provider can provide guidance on safe exercise and physical activity for individuals with asthma and can help adjust medication as needed to manage symptoms. A healthcare provider can provide guidance on specific dietary recommendations and lifestyle changes that may be helpful for individual cases of asthma.

2.12 Diet and Nutrition for Asthma

There is no specific diet that can cure asthma, certain foods and nutrients can help manage symptoms and improve lung function. Here are some dietary tips for managing asthma:

Eat a balanced diet: A balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats can help reduce inflammation and boost lung function.

Omega-3 fatty acids: Omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines, as well as in flaxseeds and chia seeds, can help reduce inflammation and improve lung function.

Vitamin D: Studies have shown that people with low levels of vitamin D may have more severe asthma symptoms. Good sources of vitamin D include fortified dairy products, fatty fish, and sunlight.

Magnesium: Magnesium is important for lung function and can help relax the airways. Good sources of magnesium include green leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.

Avoid trigger foods: Some people with asthma may have trigger foods that can worsen their symptoms. Common trigger foods include dairy, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, and shellfish. If you notice that certain foods worsen your asthma symptoms, try avoiding them.

Stay hydrated: Drinking plenty of water can help keep the airways hydrated and make it easier to breathe.

Limit processed foods: Processed foods, fast food, and sugary drinks can increase inflammation and worsen asthma symptoms. Try to limit these foods and focus on whole, nutrient-dense foods instead.

Remember to always talk to your doctor before making any significant changes to your diet or adding supplements. Consider dietary supplements: Some dietary supplements, such as omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D, may have anti-inflammatory properties that can help reduce asthma symptoms. However, it is important to consult with a healthcare provider before taking any supplements.

2.13 Exercise and physical activity for Asthma

Exercise and physical activity can be beneficial for individuals with asthma. Regular exercise can help improve lung function, reduce inflammation, and increase overall fitness, which can help reduce the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms. However, it is important to approach exercise with caution and to consult with a healthcare provider before starting an exercise program. The following are some tips for exercising with asthma:

Warm up and cool down: It is important to warm up before exercise to prepare the body for physical activity and to cool down afterward to help prevent symptoms.

Choose low-impact activities: Low-impact activities, such as walking, cycling, or swimming, are less likely to trigger asthma symptoms than high-impact activities, such as running or high-intensity interval training.

Avoid exercising in cold weather: Cold, dry air can trigger asthma symptoms, so it is important to avoid exercising in cold weather or to wear a scarf or face mask to help warm and moisten the air.

Monitor symptoms: It is important to monitor asthma symptoms during exercise and to stop or slow down if symptoms occur.

2.14 Coping with the disease of Asthma

Living with asthma can be challenging, but there are several ways you can cope with the disease and manage your symptoms. Here are some tips for coping with asthma:

Follow your treatment plan: It is important to take your asthma medications as prescribed by your healthcare provider, even when you are feeling well. This can help prevent asthma symptoms and reduce the risk of asthma attacks.

Identify and avoid triggers: Identifying and avoiding triggers such as allergens, irritants, and exercise can help prevent asthma symptoms from occurring.

Use an asthma action plan: An asthma action plan is a written plan that outlines steps to take in case of an asthma attack. It can include information such as when to take medications, when to seek medical attention, and how to identify worsening symptoms.

Stay active: Regular exercise can help improve lung function and overall health. It is important to work with your healthcare provider to develop an exercise plan that is safe and appropriate for your asthma.

Manage stress: Stress can be a trigger for asthma symptoms. Finding ways to manage stress, such as meditation, deep breathing, or yoga, may help reduce the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms.

Get support: Living with asthma can be difficult, and it may be helpful to talk to others who are going through similar experiences. Support groups and online forums can provide a sense of community and connection.

Educate yourself about asthma: Learning about asthma and how it affects the body can help individuals feel more in control of their condition.

Set goals: Setting realistic goals for managing asthma can help individuals feel a sense of accomplishment and control.

Practice stress-reducing techniques: Stress can exacerbate asthma symptoms, so practicing stress-reducing techniques, such as meditation, deep breathing, or yoga, can be helpful.

Join a support group: Joining a support group for individuals with asthma can provide a sense of community and support.

Communicate with healthcare providers: It is important to communicate openly and honestly with healthcare providers about asthma symptoms, medication use, and any concerns or questions.

By following these tips, you may be able to cope with asthma and manage your symptoms more effectively. However, it is important to remember that asthma is a chronic disease that requires ongoing management and monitoring, and there may be times when symptoms worsen despite your best efforts. If you experience any changes in your asthma symptoms, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Maintaining a positive outlook and seeking support from friends, family, and healthcare professionals can be important for individuals with asthma.

2.15 Support and Manage side effects of Asthma

Emotional support and managing symptoms and side effects are important aspects of managing asthma. The following are some tips for emotional support and managing symptoms and side effects:

Seek emotional support: Living with asthma can be stressful and emotional. It's important to have a support system in place to help manage feelings of anxiety or depression. Friends, family, and mental health professionals can all provide emotional support.

Be prepared for emergencies: Having a written asthma action plan and carrying quick-relief medication can help individuals manage symptoms and prevent severe asthma attacks.

Seek support from friends and family: Friends and family can provide emotional support and help with managing day-to-day tasks when asthma symptoms are present.

Address side effects of medications: Some medications for asthma can cause side effects, such as tremors, rapid heartbeat, or difficulty sleeping. Discussing any side effects with a healthcare provider can help manage them effectively.

3. Conclusion

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that affects millions of people worldwide. It is a significant health concern in India, and efforts to improve diagnosis, treatment, and management of the disease are needed to reduce its impact on public health. It is characterized by inflammation and narrowing of the airways, which can lead to symptoms such as wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath. The underlying causes of asthma are complex and not fully understood and there is no known cure for asthma. There are several treatment options available to help manage symptoms and prevent exacerbations. These treatments may include medications, lifestyle changes, and avoiding triggers. Additionally, there are several steps individuals can take to prevent asthma symptoms and reduce the frequency and severity of asthma attacks. Maintaining a positive outlook and seeking support from friends, family, and healthcare professionals can help individuals with asthma manage their condition and improve their quality of life. Emotional support and managing symptoms and side effects are important for managing asthma and improving quality of life. By working closely with their healthcare provider and following a comprehensive treatment and management plan, many people with asthma are able to live active and healthy lives. It is important to remember that asthma is a chronic disease that requires ongoing monitoring and management, and individuals with asthma should seek medical attention if they experience any changes in their symptoms.

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