



DOSSIER · SUBSTANCE

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP)

5-Hydroxytryptophan is an amino acid and serotonin precursor; small human studies report decreasing depression scores and shorter time to fall asleep, otherwise mixed findings.

83

STUDIES IN
TOTAL

30

IN HUMANS

15

OF WHICH
CONTROLLED

13

IN ANIMALS

3

IN THE LAB

Figures from the IHR study database · Last updated 2026-10-15

How to Read This Dossier

ESTABLISHED

measured in humans, with a comparison group

PLAUSIBLE

supported by mechanism, animal studies or observation

HYPOTHESIS

a likely connection that still needs to be tested

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) at a Glance

In depressive mood, depression scores of a first depressive episode decreased under 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance, similar to under fluoxetine ⁷; in Parkinson's patients, the Hamilton score fell more than under placebo in a preliminary study ¹¹.

For sleep, 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance shortened the objective sleep onset latency compared with no intake in a small study in older adults ¹²; in Parkinson's patients with REM sleep behavior disorder, the REM sleep proportion increased, and the self-reported frequency of the disorder also improved under placebo ¹⁴.

In fibromyalgia, 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance improved the clinical parameters in a controlled study ²²; in a comparative study, the combination with an MAO inhibitor improved the pain score the most ²⁰.

Regarding appetite and body weight, a fat spread with 5-Hydroxytryptophan, L-theanine and γ-aminobutyric acid did not influence hunger and satiety according to the authors; this says nothing about 5-Hydroxytryptophan alone ¹⁸.

A meta-analysis that evaluated tryptophan and 5-Hydroxytryptophan together found no difference in BMI compared with the control groups ³.

We evaluated 40 human studies on 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), including 17 randomised controlled trials and 4 meta-analyses or systematic reviews; the controlled studies include 539 participants in total. As of 14 October 2026.

1. What Is 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP)? Occurrence, Origin and Forms

5-Hydroxytryptophan is an amino acid that the body makes from L-tryptophan and converts further into serotonin. As a supplement it is usually obtained from the seeds of the West African legume Griffonia simplicifolia. It is commonly used for low mood, for sleep problems and for complaints that are linked to serotonin metabolism.

In nature, 5-hydroxytryptophan occurs in the seeds of Griffonia simplicifolia and in small amounts in other plants and in animal tissues. In the body it is formed continuously as an intermediate step in the build-up of serotonin.

For supplements, 5-hydroxytryptophan is either extracted from Griffonia seeds or produced synthetically; as a medicinal substance it is called oxitriptan. Studies in humans mainly examine capsules and tablets containing 5-hydroxytryptophan alone, alongside combinations with carbidopa.

Forms and Preparations Studied

- 5-hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance in capsules or tablets
- Extract from the seeds of Griffonia simplicifolia
- Oxitriptan as a medicinal substance
- Preparations with delayed release
- Medicinal combination of oxitriptan and carbidopa
- Mixture products with further active substances

Not covered on this page:

- L-tryptophan, the precursor substance, is a substance in its own right with its own studies.
- Serotonergic drugs such as reuptake-inhibiting antidepressants are not 5-hydroxytryptophan preparations.
- Melatonin is a different substance with a different pathway.
- Carbidopa alone is not 5-hydroxytryptophan.

2. What Does 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) Do? Results by Area

AREA	RESULT IN CONTROLLED STUDIES	STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE	STUDIES	PARTICIPANTS
Depressed mood	mostly improved	moderate	0 meta-analyses · 4 controlled · 9 other	111
Sleep	mostly improved	moderate	1 meta-analyses · 3 controlled · 6 other	68
Fibromyalgia	mixed	low	0 meta-analyses · 2 controlled · 3 other	50
Anxiety	mostly no difference	unclear	0 meta-analyses · 1 controlled · 5 other	30
Appetite and body weight	mixed	unclear	0 meta-analyses · 1 controlled · 3 other	0
Other investigations	mostly no difference	low	0 meta-analyses · 7 controlled · 12 other	129

How to read the table: counted are human studies whose results concern the area. “High” means at least one meta-analysis and two controlled studies showing improvement, or at least three controlled studies of which three quarters show improvement, with at least 300 participants in total. “Moderate” means at least two controlled studies showing improvement, as a majority, or one meta-analysis alongside controlled studies. “Low” means one controlled study showing improvement. Where an area has no controlled study, the strength of evidence is at most “low” (result “reviews only” or “observational data only”). Everything else is “unclear”. A study counts as showing improvement when at least half of its outcomes in this area improved. Reviews of combination products do not count as meta-analyses; results that only describe side effects or shares of users do not count as an effect. The same study is counted only once.

3. What the Studies Show in Detail

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and Depressed Mood: Human Studies

In first depressive episode, depression scores decreased under 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance ⁷; in a preliminary study in Parkinson's patients, the Hamilton score fell more under the pure substance than under placebo ¹¹. In a randomized controlled study, the response rate under the pure substance was not better than under fluoxetine ⁷. The robust findings predominantly concern the pure substance in capsules or tablets. Combination products with other active substances such as L-tryptophan, omega-3, SAME, zinc, tyrosine, lecithin, L-glutamine, chlorimipramine or benzerazide say nothing about 5-Hydroxytryptophan alone ¹²¹⁰. The studies are mostly small and short, some without placebo comparison, and controlled data on delayed release as well as on Griffonia extract are lacking. It remains open whether the results can be transferred to other preparations and to longer-term use.

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON
¹ Shaw et al. 2002	meta-analysis · 64 participants	5-hydroxytryptophan or L-tryptophan; vs. Placebo
² Shaw et al. 2001	systematic review · 64 participants	5-HTP or tryptophan preparations; vs. Placebo
³ Adekunle et al. 2024	meta-analysis	Tryptophan and 5-HTP supplementation; vs. Control groups of included RCTs
⁷ Jangid et al. 2013	randomised controlled · 60 participants	l-5-hydroxytryptophan versus fluoxetine; 8 weeks; vs. fluoxetine
¹⁰ Nardini et al. 1983	randomised controlled · 26 participants	L-5-HTP combined with chlorimipramine; L-5-HTP 300 mg/day, chlorimipramine 50 mg/day; 28 days; vs. chlorimipra
¹¹ Meloni et al. 2020	randomised controlled · 25 participants	5-HTP (pure substance); 50 mg daily; 4 weeks; vs. placebo, randomized double-blind crossover
²¹ Mendlewicz et al. 1980	randomised controlled	L-5-hydroxytryptophan with benzerazide, some plus L-deprenil; vs. L-deprenil plus L-5-HTP vs. L-5-HTP alone vs. pl
²⁵ Kioussis et al. 2017	study · 15 participants	5-HTP plus creatine monohydrate added to SSRI/SNRI; 100 mg 5-HTP twice daily, 5 g creatine daily; 8 weeks treatme

Further studies in this area: [34](#) [36](#) [37](#) [38](#) [40](#)

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and Sleep: Human Studies

In older adults with poor sleep, 5-hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance shortened objective sleep onset latency compared with no intake, but subjective total sleep time decreased ¹². In Parkinson's patients with REM sleep behavior disorder, the proportion of REM sleep increased, and the reported frequency of the disorder also improved under placebo ¹⁴. The strength of evidence is moderate; the controlled studies are small and short, and the forms investigated range from pure substance to combination products to oxitriptan, so findings cannot be transferred to other preparations.

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON	R
⁴ Meolie et al. 2005	systematic review	5-hydroxytryptophan among many other remedies; vs. placebo or control where studies existed	e
⁹ Sutanto et al. 2024	randomised controlled · 30 participants	5-HTP supplement; 100 mg 5-HTP daily; 12 weeks; vs. supplementation vs. no supplementation (single-blinded)	S
¹² 2021	randomised controlled · 20 participants	5-HTP as pure substance; 100 mg 5-HTP daily; 12 weeks; vs. 5-HTP consumption vs. no consumption	C
¹⁴ Meloni et al. 2022	randomised controlled · 18 participants	5-HTP (pure substance); 50 mg daily; 4 weeks; vs. placebo, crossover	p
²⁴ Sarzi et al. 1992	case series · 50 participants	5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan (5-HTP); 90 days; vs. no control, open study versus baseline	c

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON	R
²⁸ Leu-Semenescu et al. 2010	case report · 1 participants	5-hydroxytryptophan (oxitriptan), serotonin precursor; vs. before/after treatment, levodopa administration	s
³⁴ Chehadi et al. 2025	review	Plant-derived tryptophan modulators incl. 5-hydroxytryptophan	s
³⁵ Jiménez-Jiménez et al. 2021	review	5-hydroxytryptophan; short- and medium-term; vs. randomized clinical trials, placebo	e

Further studies in this area: ³⁶ ⁴⁰

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and Fibromyalgia: Human Studies

In fibromyalgia, 5-hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance improved the clinical parameters in a controlled study with 50 participants ²². In a randomized comparative study, the combination of 5-hydroxytryptophan with an MAO inhibitor clearly improved the pain score, while the other treatments, including 5-hydroxytryptophan alone, brought lesser improvements ²⁰. The evidence is weak: there is one controlled study on the pure substance; the second tested a combination product without a placebo arm. In addition, there is a case series, an observational study (case-control study) and a review ²⁴⁴⁰. 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance was investigated; results on Griffonia extract, oxitriptan or delayed-release preparations are lacking for this area.

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON	RESULT
²⁰ Nicolodi et al. 1996	randomised controlled	5-HTP alone or with MAO inhibitors; vs. MAO inhibitors alone, amitriptyline	pain on Visual Analogic Scale (0
²² Caruso et al. 1990	controlled · 50 participants	5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP); vs. placebo, double-blind	clinical parameters: improved (s
²⁴ Sarzi et al. 1992	case series · 50 participants	5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan (5-HTP); 90 days; vs. no control, open study versus baseline	number of tender points: improv
³² Rus et al. 2018	case-control study	no administration; measurement of plasma 5-HTP; vs. fibromyalgia patients vs. healthy controls	plasma 5-HTP: worsened (lower
⁴⁰ Juhl et al. 1998	review	5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) or L-tryptophan	Somatic pains: improved

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and Anxiety: Human Studies

For anxiety in older people, a small randomized study without placebo found no effect of 5-hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance on the anxiety score ⁸. A randomized controlled study on a combination product of 5-HTP with tyrosine, lecithin and L-glutamine reports an improvement in tension-anxiety, but this result applies only to the combination and not to 5-hydroxytryptophan alone ⁶. The evidence is unclear: for the pure substance there is only a small study with 30 participants without placebo, no meta-analysis. Capsules with 5-HTP pure substance as well as the aforementioned combination product were investigated; it remains open whether 5-hydroxytryptophan alone has any effect on anxiety at all.

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON	RESULT
⁸ Li et al. 2025	randomised controlled · 30 participants	5-HTP capsules (pure substance); 100 mg daily; 12 weeks; vs. no supplementation (control group)	GAI score (anxiety
²⁴ Sarzi et al. 1992	case series · 50 participants	5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan (5-HTP); 90 days; vs. no control, open study versus baseline	anxiety: improved
³⁴ Chehadi et al. 2025	review	Plant-derived tryptophan modulators incl. 5-hydroxytryptophan	anxiety reduction:
³⁶ Maffei et al. 2020	review	5-hydroxytryptophan and 5-HTP preparations	role in anxiety and

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON	RESULT
³⁹ Weeks et al. 2009	review	5-HTP as dietary supplement	Relaxation: improv
⁴⁰ Juhl et al. 1998	review	5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) or L-tryptophan	Anxiety symptoms

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), Appetite and Body Weight: Human Studies

For appetite and body weight, a meta-analysis that evaluated tryptophan and 5-hydroxytryptophan together found no difference in BMI compared with control groups ³; for 5-hydroxytryptophan alone, this cannot be inferred. A fat spread with 5-hydroxytryptophan, L-theanine, and γ-aminobutyric acid did not influence hunger and satiety according to the authors ¹⁸. A single case report on oxitriptan in a man with sepiapterin reductase deficiency reports an improvement in hyperphagia, but as a single case it cannot be generalized ²⁸. A review that includes animal studies and clinical studies classifies the role of 5-hydroxytryptophan in obesity as unclear ³⁶. The evidence is therefore overall unclear, and reliable statements on pure substance or Griffonia extract for appetite and weight are lacking.

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON
³ Adekunle et al. 2024	meta-analysis	Tryptophan and 5-HTP supplementation; vs. Control groups of included RCTs
¹⁸ Pilipenko et al. 2023	randomised controlled	Vegetable-fat spread enriched with 5-hydroxytryptophan, L-theanine and γ-aminobutyric acid; 45 g/day spread with 0.67% 5-HTP
²⁸ Leu-Semenescu et al. 2010	case report · 1 participants	5-hydroxytryptophan (oxitriptan), serotonin precursor; vs. before/after treatment, levodopa administration
³⁶ Maffei et al. 2020	review	5-hydroxytryptophan and 5-HTP preparations

5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP): Further Outcomes in Studies

For this area, there are seven controlled studies with a total of 129 participants that tested 5-hydroxytryptophan in very different forms and in very different groups of people. Two small, single-blind studies with older adults and without placebo found a higher MoCA score and higher serum serotonin with the pure substance ⁸ as well as a more favorable microbiota composition in poor sleepers ⁹. The authors of the first study urge cautious interpretation because of the small sample. A randomized controlled study with a Griffonia simplicifolia extract showed no pain relief and even a greater extent of mechanical allodynia ¹³. The evidence is weak: the studies are predominantly small, short and investigate different forms, doses and populations, so the results are not generalizable.

STUDY	DESIGN · PARTICIPANTS	PREPARATION · DOSE · DURATION · COMPARISON
³ Adekunle et al. 2024	meta-analysis	Tryptophan and 5-HTP supplementation; vs. Control groups of included RCTs
⁸ Li et al. 2025	randomised controlled · 30 participants	5-HTP capsules (pure substance); 100 mg daily; 12 weeks; vs. no supplementation (control group)
⁹ Sutanto et al. 2024	randomised controlled · 30 participants	5-HTP supplement; 100 mg 5-HTP daily; 12 weeks; vs. supplementation vs. no supplementation (single-blinded)
¹¹ Meloni et al. 2020	randomised controlled · 25 participants	5-HTP (pure substance); 50 mg daily; 4 weeks; vs. placebo, randomized double-blind crossover
¹³ Schlemmer et al. 2026	randomised controlled · 18 participants	Griffonia simplicifolia orally; 100 mg once daily; 28 days, then 4-week washout; vs. Placebo, double-blind, crossover
¹⁴ Meloni et al. 2022	randomised controlled · 18 participants	5-HTP (pure substance); 50 mg daily; 4 weeks; vs. placebo, crossover
¹⁶ Joy et al. 2008	randomised controlled · 8 participants	oral 5-HTP (over-the-counter); 100 mg/day at bedtime; 10 days, 4-day washout; vs. placebo, randomized double-blind
¹⁷ Jackson et al. 2026	randomised controlled	5-hydroxytryptophan (serotonin precursor); acute single dose, testing 90 min post-administration; vs. placebo, double-blind

Further studies in this area: [23](#) [24](#) [26](#) [27](#) [28](#) [29](#) [30](#) [31](#) [33](#) [34](#) [36](#)

4. How Is 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) Dosed? Preparation, Dose and Duration in Studies

The studies used 5-Hydroxytryptophan predominantly as a pure substance in capsules or tablets ⁷⁸⁹¹¹¹²¹⁴¹⁶¹⁷²². Delayed-release preparations and oxitriptan as a drug were not tested in the controlled studies on the areas mentioned.

PREPARATION OR FORM	DOSE	DURATION	STUDY
Nutraceutical combination with omega-3, SAME, zinc, 5-HTP, folic acid	EPA 1 g, DHA 656 mg (5-HTP dose not reported)	8 weeks	⁵
combined tyrosine, lecithin, L-glutamine and 5-HTP	—	observed up to day 6	⁶
l-5-hydroxytryptophan versus fluoxetine	—	8 weeks	⁷
5-HTP capsules (pure substance)	100 mg daily	12 weeks	⁸
5-HTP supplement	100 mg 5-HTP daily	12 weeks	⁹
L-5-HTP combined with chlorimipramine	L-5-HTP 300 mg/day, chlorimipramine 50 mg/day	28 days	¹⁰
5-HTP (pure substance)	50 mg daily	4 weeks	¹¹
5-HTP as pure substance	100 mg 5-HTP daily	12 weeks	¹²
Griffonia simplicifolia orally	100 mg once daily	28 days, then 4-week washout	¹³
5-HTP (pure substance)	50 mg daily	4 weeks	¹⁴
1 mg melatonin + 10 mg 5-HTP (M-5HTP)	1 mg melatonin + 10 mg 5-HTP at 8 p.m.	at least four weeks	¹⁵
oral 5-HTP (over-the-counter)	100 mg/day at bedtime	10 days, 4-day washout	¹⁶
5-hydroxytryptophan (serotonin precursor)	—	acute single dose, testing 90 min post-administration	¹⁷
Vegetable-fat spread enriched with 5-hydroxytryptophan, L-theanine and γ-aminobutyric acid	45 g/day spread with 0.67% 5-HTP, 0.56% L-theanine, 0.45% GABA	10 days	¹⁸

5. Is 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) Safe? Side Effects in Studies

The reported side effects were predominantly mild and temporary ¹³²²; fatigue, nausea or vomiting were also reported ¹⁷ as well as, without assignment to a treatment group, mild stomach pain and sleep disturbances ²⁰. In an open case series, just under a third of the participants reported side effects, and one was therefore withdrawn from treatment ²⁴.

STUDY	REPORTED SIDE EFFECTS
² Shaw et al. 2001	Possible link to eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome not elucidated
⁷ Jangid et al. 2013	tolerance assessed by CGI scale at study end
¹³ Schlemmer et al. 2026	Mild, transient adverse events in two participants (11%)
¹⁴ Meloni et al. 2022	5-HTP safe; no increase in RBD episodes
¹⁷ Jackson et al. 2026	19.6% of 5-HTP group: fatigue, nausea or vomiting
¹⁸ Pilipenko et al. 2023	Monitored daily; spread was well tolerated
²⁰ Nicolodi et al. 1996	sleep disturbances, mild stomach-ache, transient cheese effect
²² Caruso et al. 1990	only mild and transient side-effects
²³ Knäpper et al. 2023	5 adverse events, all mild or moderate; 3 treatment-related (2 headaches, 1 dizziness)
²⁴ Sarzi et al. 1992	15 (30%) reported side-effects, one withdrawal

STUDY	REPORTED SIDE EFFECTS
²⁵ Kiouss et al. 2017	no serious treatment-related adverse events
³³ Pardo et al. 2012	Mania

6. What Remains Open: Limits of the Evidence

- The controlled studies are mostly small and short; many include only a few participants ⁸⁹¹²¹³¹⁴¹⁶.
- For Griffonia extract, oxitriptan and delayed-release preparations, controlled data are lacking for most areas.
- Results on combination products with other active substances cannot be transferred to 5-Hydroxytryptophan alone ¹²³⁵⁶¹⁰¹⁵¹⁸¹⁹²⁰.
- The transferability to longer-term use and to other populations is open.
- For anxiety and for appetite and body weight, the evidence is limited or unclear.

7. Bottom Line: What Is Established About 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP)

5-Hydroxytryptophan is an amino acid and a precursor of serotonin. Controlled human research shows decreasing depression scores under the pure substance for depressive mood ⁷ and, preliminarily, in Parkinson's patients compared with placebo ¹¹.

The strength of the evidence is limited by small and short studies, missing controlled data on Griffonia extract, oxitriptan and delayed release, as well as by the frequent testing of combination products. The reported side effects were predominantly mild and temporary ¹³¹⁷²⁰²².

Frequently Asked Questions

How well has 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) been studied in humans?

We evaluated 40 human studies on 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), including 17 randomised controlled trials and 4 meta-analyses or systematic reviews; the controlled studies include 539 participants in total. As of 14 October 2026.

Does 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) help with depressed mood? What the studies show

We evaluated 4 controlled studies and 9 further studies; the controlled studies include 111 participants in total. Result of the controlled studies: mostly improved. Strength of evidence under our published rules: moderate. Sources: ¹²³⁷

Does 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) help with sleep? What the studies show

We evaluated one meta-analysis or systematic review, 3 controlled studies and 6 further studies; the controlled studies include 68 participants in total. Result of the controlled studies: mostly improved. Strength of evidence under our published rules: moderate. Sources: ⁴⁹¹²¹⁴

Does 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) help with fibromyalgia? What the studies show

We evaluated 2 controlled studies and 3 further studies; the controlled studies include 50 participants in total. Result of the controlled studies: mixed. Strength of evidence under our published rules: low. Sources: ²⁰²²²⁴³²

Does 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) help with anxiety? What the studies show

We evaluated one controlled study and 5 further studies; the controlled studies include 30 participants in total. Result of the controlled studies: mostly no difference. Strength of evidence under our published rules: unclear. Sources: ⁸²⁴³⁴³⁶

Does 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) help with appetite and body weight? What the studies show

We evaluated one controlled study and 3 further studies. Result of the controlled studies: mixed. Strength of evidence under our published rules: unclear. Sources: ³¹⁸²⁸³⁶

What is 5-Hydroxytryptophan?

5-Hydroxytryptophan is an amino acid that is formed in the body from L-tryptophan and converted to serotonin. As a dietary supplement, it is mostly obtained from the seeds of *Griffonia simplicifolia*. It is usually used for depressed mood, sleep problems and complaints that are associated with serotonin metabolism.

Do human studies show an effect in depressive mood?

Two controlled studies with the pure substance found decreasing depression scores: in first depressive episode⁷ and, preliminarily and compared with placebo, in Parkinson's patients¹¹. In a randomized controlled study, the response rate under the pure substance was not better than under fluoxetine⁷. The studies are mostly small and short, some without placebo comparison.

What is the evidence on sleep?

A randomized controlled study with 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance found an improved sleep onset latency¹².

Are there studies on fibromyalgia?

A controlled study with 50 participants found an improvement in the clinical parameters under 5-Hydroxytryptophan as a pure substance²². In a randomized comparative study, the combination with an MAO inhibitor improved the pain score markedly, while 5-Hydroxytryptophan alone brought lesser improvements²⁰. Results on *Griffonia* extract, oxitriptan or delayed-release preparations are lacking for this area.

What side effects were reported?

In an open case series, just under a third of the participants reported side effects, and one was therefore withdrawn from treatment²⁴. One case of mania was reported³³; a possible connection with eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome is not clarified².

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Research, put in context. Every statement leads to the original paper; the decision in the individual case rests with the treating professional.
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