

# *Treating depression without using prescribed medication*

*Booklet for patients and carers*



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## What is SIGN?

The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) write guidelines which give advice to doctors, nurses, surgeons, physiotherapists, dentists, occupational therapists and patients about the best treatments that are available.

We write these guidelines by working with doctors, nurses and other NHS staff and with patients, carers and members of the public. The guidelines are based on the most up-to-date evidence.

You can read more about SIGN by visiting [www.sign.ac.uk](http://www.sign.ac.uk)

## Who is this booklet for and what is it about?

This booklet is for you if:

- ◉ you think you may be depressed; or
- ◉ you have already been diagnosed with depression and are considering your treatment options.

Your family, friends and carers may also find this booklet useful.

This booklet is based on the recommendations from the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) national clinical guideline on non-pharmaceutical management of depression in adults.

Our guidelines are based on medical and scientific research, which involves carrying out trials of different treatments and methods of care.

The guideline development group are a group of people from across Scotland who wrote the clinical guideline on which this booklet is based. They include NHS staff, staff from areas such as social work, and patients and members of the public.

The group looked at the research evidence available on how well different treatments work, and we used this evidence to make recommendations for healthcare professionals on how best to treat patients with depression.

Our booklet aims to help you to make positive treatment choices based on the most up-to-date medical and scientific research.

The booklet explains:

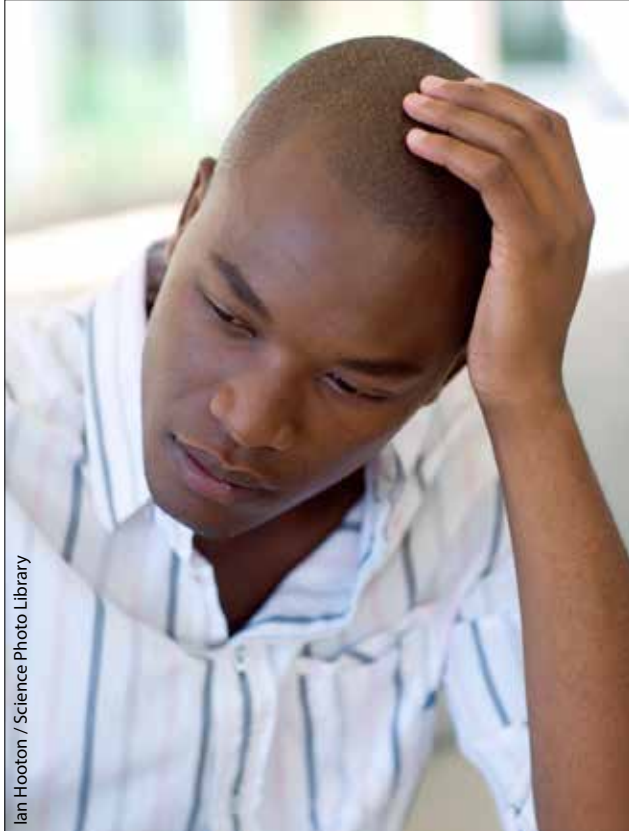
- what depression is;
- the treatment (aside from drugs) that may be available; and
- what you can expect from treatment.

It does not cover:

- children who are depressed;
- psychotic depression (when a person is so depressed that they lose touch with reality);
- perinatal or postnatal depression (depression in women who are pregnant or who have had a baby) – 'Mood disorders during pregnancy and after the birth of your baby' [www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/PAT127.pdf](http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/PAT127.pdf)
- bipolar disorder (manic depression)
- personality disorder;
- addiction, such as drug addiction;
- brain injury or dementia
- learning disabilities.

Some of the support organisations on page 22 may be able to give you information on these conditions.

# What is depression and how will I feel if I am depressed?



Depression is a common health condition. One in five people in Scotland will experience depression at some point in their lives. The exact causes are not clear and it can develop for no apparent reason. Some people become depressed when something stressful or upsetting happens in their life, for example:

- losing their job;
- losing a loved one;
- being diagnosed with a serious illness; or
- breaking up with a partner.

You may be experiencing other difficulties in your life which are making you feel depressed. Some people become depressed even when everything is going well.

Depression is a very personal experience, but here are some thoughts from people who are depressed.

***“Something is wrong but I can’t explain how I feel.”***

***“I can’t stop crying.”***

***“I feel so bad, I can’t cry anymore.”***

***“I’m in a room with no windows.”***

***“I want to be alone.”***

***“I don’t want to be alone.”***

***“Why do I feel like this?”***

***“Help me. I feel really bad.”***

***“I feel really low.”***

***“I have no energy.”***

You may have had similar thoughts yourself. Remember, these are just examples and your experience may be different.

Some people can become so severely depressed that they may pose a significant risk to themselves or others. They may repeatedly think about death (not just fear of dying), suicide or have a specific plan for committing suicide. Some people may have such severe depression that they can lose all ability to function normally.

Severe depression is not covered in this booklet, but if you think you may be experiencing severe depression please contact your general practitioner (GP) straight away or phone NHS24 on 111 or Samaritans on 116 123.



Depression is more than just feeling unhappy or 'down in the dumps'. If you are depressed, you might notice that you are finding it harder to cope with your everyday life. You are likely to experience some of the following symptoms for more than two weeks.

- little interest or pleasure in doing things
- feeling down, depressed or hopeless
- trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- feeling tired or having little energy
- poor appetite or overeating
- feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down
- trouble concentrating on things like reading a newspaper or watching television
- moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed, or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual
- thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself in some way

The more of these symptoms you have, the more important it is to get help and speak to someone about how you are feeling. Having depression doesn't mean that you are weak and you can't just 'pull yourself together'. Depression is an illness, but the good news is that there are things you can do to get better.

It is best to visit your GP for help, or talk to someone who can support you to find help. Depression can make you tired and forgetful, as well as making some issues difficult to talk about. Keeping a few notes and giving them to your GP can help you to talk about your thoughts and feelings. There is space at the back of this booklet to do this.

If you are not comfortable talking to your GP, you should choose another GP in your practice.

## How will my GP know I have depression?

Your GP might ask about how you are coping and managing with different parts of your life, for example:

- work;
- family and friends;
- relationships;
- money problems; and
- hobbies.

They might also ask if people in your family have experienced depression in the past.

Asking you about these things will help you and your GP to understand why you might be feeling depressed. Your GP might ask you to think about how you have been feeling for the past month. They might ask you the questions below to work out if you have depression and if you would like help.

- ‘During the past month, have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?’
- ‘During the past month, have you often been bothered by having little interest and pleasure in doing things?’

These questions may help you to talk about your feelings. You may find it difficult, but it is important to answer them as honestly as you can so your GP can help you.

If you answer 'yes' to either of these questions, then your GP may ask you more questions to find out how bad your depression is. They may ask you to fill in a questionnaire.

A common questionnaire is one called PHQ-9. You can see this questionnaire and take the test at the Doing Well website ([www.doingwell.org.uk](http://www.doingwell.org.uk)).

Your answers to the questionnaire will help your GP work out your depression score.

Knowing your PHQ score will help you and your GP decide the best treatment for you. You can monitor your progress by filling in the questionnaire again. Your GP may also ask if you have thought about harming yourself or committing suicide.

If at any time you think about harming yourself or committing suicide, you should tell your GP straight away or phone NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24. You can also talk to the Samaritans by phoning their confidential helpline on 0845 790 9090.



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## What might help me feel better?

You may feel that nothing will be able to help you, but there are different treatment options that may help make you feel better. If you have mild depression, you should not choose medication at first. This booklet looks at the other types of treatment for depression and explains what your choices are.

It's important to remember that depression is a very personal experience. You should choose treatment that fits with your ideas about your problem and yourself, and feel confident that it will help. It is hard or even impossible to say which treatment might be best for someone. There is not one effective treatment for everyone, some therapies work better for some people at different times.

Based on the research evidence, some treatments are likely to be more effective. Ways of improving depression which have not been proven to be very effective on their own, may be helpful when used at the same time as an effective treatment.

### *Will psychological therapies help me and how do I access them?*

Psychological therapies is the name for a range of treatments that usually involve talking one-to-one with a therapist.

Psychological therapies can help people with depression and are provided by people who:

- are trained in therapy;
- receive regular supervision to give the treatment; and
- have experience of working with people with depression.

Your GP will give you information to help you to make your choice.

It is important that you choose a therapy which feels right for you. Before you make your choice you should think about:

- the positive and negative points of the treatment;
- how long you will have to wait to get the treatment;
- how long the treatment lasts;
- what the risks are if you don't respond to the treatment; and
- whether you will have to pay anything.

It is extremely important that you choose a therapist who is registered with a professional organisation and who you feel comfortable speaking to.

### *Psychological therapies which are recommended for depression*

The following treatments are supported by good-quality scientific research evidence.

#### **Behavioural activation**

A therapist will try to help you find activities you enjoy that you may have stopped doing. They will help you to find out why you have stopped doing things that you previously enjoyed and work with you to help you get back into these activities.

#### **Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)**

If you are depressed you may think negatively about situations. This may cause you to stop doing activities that you used to enjoy. CBT focuses on how your thoughts, feelings and behaviour influence your mood. It involves working with a therapist who will help you challenge your unhelpful thoughts and behaviour.

## **Couple-focused therapy**

Couple-focused therapy could help you if your relationship with your partner is adding to your depression. It focuses on any problems that you may have in your relationship. A therapist will work with you to change the way you and your partner interact so that you develop a more supportive relationship.

## **Interpersonal therapy**

Interpersonal therapy is when trained professionals help you deal with problems in your life, such as relationships. It is based on the idea that personal problems can contribute to psychological problems such as depression.

## **Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT)**

If you have experienced depression three or more times, MBCT may be an option for you. It is based on the idea of becoming at peace with yourself. This treatment can help reduce the chances of you becoming depressed again. MBCT focuses on helping you live fully in the present, rather than being bothered with negative thoughts about the past or the future.

## **Problem solving therapy**

This therapy helps you find out what your problems are, work out what your aims are and come up with ways of achieving them.

## **Psychodynamic psychotherapy**

Psychodynamic psychotherapy explores the problems that are in your past and present relationships and everyday life. It focuses on your relationship with the therapist to help you understand your relationships with others.

The problems you have interacting with others will eventually show in your relationship with your therapist.

Your therapist will help you to explore the thoughts and feelings you are aware of (conscious) and those which you are not aware of (unconscious). It can help you to understand how your problems may have developed when you were a child.

### *Other psychological therapies*

There is not enough evidence to say whether the following treatments are effective in treating depression.

- **Art therapy** - This is when you express your feelings and emotions through art such as painting and drawing.
- **Cognitive behavioural analysis system of psychotherapy (CBASP)** - This has been developed for people who have chronic (long-term) depression. It focuses on helping you understand how your behaviour can cause problems in your personal relationships.
- **Cognitive analytic therapy** - A therapy which uses parts of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy. It focuses on discovering why you have had emotional problems and looks back at their childhood.
- **Counselling** - Counselling allows you to talk about your feelings with a trained therapist. A counsellor will not give you advice, but they will listen to you and support you to help yourself.
- **Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing** - This is used with people who have experienced trauma. You remember the traumatic event while making very quick eye movements.



- **Family therapy** - Family therapy aims to deal with problems as part of the family and focuses on how the family interacts.
- **Hypnotherapy** - Hypnotherapy uses hypnosis. Hypnosis is a mental state where you become more responsive to suggestions.
- **Music therapy** - Music therapy focuses on expressing your feelings and emotions through music to help you to interpret your depression.
- **Neurolinguistic programming** - A technique that detect and changes unconscious thoughts and behaviours. It aims to help you to improve how you think, behave and feel.
- **Reminiscence therapy** - Reminiscence therapy involves reviewing experiences and emotions you may have had in the past and seeing how they are affecting your current life and relationships.

### *Will self-help be useful?*

There are various types of self-help treatments and most are based on cognitive behavioural therapy. Guided self-help has been shown to be effective. Guided self-help and guided self-help using a computer are recommended for treating depression.

### **Guided self-help**

Guided self-help uses CBT to help you change your thoughts and behaviour. Your GP can recommend self-help books and help you to access these. You could work through them yourself or you could work with a therapist. The therapist will regularly check if your symptoms of depression are improving and will help you understand the information in your books.

## **Computerised self-help (self-help using a computer)**

You can have CBT using a computer. The computer programme will guide you through the various stages of therapy just as a therapist would in a face-to-face session. As with using books, having someone to support you while using a self-help computer programme may be helpful. These programmes can help you to understand depression and develop the skills you need to deal with your problems. Some examples are 'Beating the Blues' and 'Moodgym'. Your GP can refer you to local services for these programmes.

## **Self-help support groups**

There is no evidence to tell us how useful self-help support groups are as a treatment for people with depression, but it may be helpful to speak to people in similar situations who will know what you are going through.

Many organisations offer information and support groups to people who have depression. The helplines listed on page 22 can help you to get in touch with a support group. By asking your GP to put you in touch with support groups or by using the helplines listed, you can be sure the support groups you contact have a good reputation. Self-help support groups should be:

- linked to an organisation or well-established group that can offer resources and support and promote the support group;
- regularly reviewed;
- held in places that are easy to get to;
- focused on helping people get better;

- have clear confidentiality policies; and
- led by people (facilitators) who are trained in listening, managing difficult situations and facilitation skills (skills to help groups understand and achieve their aims, without taking part in discussions). Facilitators should be supervised and supported. All support group facilitators should have a disclosure check carried out by Central Registered Body in Scotland (CRBS). A disclosure is a document which police or government departments hold and contains information on your criminal history. Organisations use a disclosure check to make sure they are making a safe decision when they employ someone.

### *Can exercise help?*



Research shows that exercise can help improve symptoms of depression and lift your mood. By doing exercise you enjoy you can build your self-confidence, meet other people and improve your mental health at the same time. Exercise includes:

- walking;
- swimming;
- playing football;

- going to the gym; and
- many other activities.

Your GP can give you information on how to contact local services for exercise activities. If you are worried about your fitness, you should talk to your GP who will be able to help you. It might be helpful to talk to someone about the best exercise for you, for example a fitness instructor. Your GP can give you advice on how to do this.

### *Are herbal remedies and nutritional supplements helpful?*

#### **St John's wort**

St John's wort is a plant used in herbal medicine. People with depression are advised not to use this because:

- St John's wort can stop some medications such as the contraceptive pill and warfarin from working properly;
- it is not clear what is the right dose for treating depression; and
- different St John's wort products vary greatly in what they contain.

There is not enough scientific evidence that the following nutritional supplements help to relieve the symptoms of depression.

- **Chromium** - A mineral found in foods such as meat, fish, vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
- **Folate** - A vitamin found in foods such as dark green leafy vegetables, cereals and orange juice.
- **Ginseng** - A plant grown in eastern Asia.
- **Glutamine** - One of the amino acids which help build proteins in the body.

- **Ginkgo biloba** - A tree whose fruits and seeds are used in traditional Chinese medicine.
- **Inositol** - A natural sugar found in animal and plant tissue.
- **Polyunsaturated fatty acid** - A fat found in oily fish such as mackerel, salmon and trout.
- **S-Adenosyl-l-methionine** - A chemical that occurs naturally in the body.
- **Selenium** - A mineral found in some foods such as meat, fish and nuts.

### **Will changing my lifestyle help?**

It is generally believed that a healthy lifestyle will help patients with depression. As well as discussing treatment options with you, your GP will offer you some general lifestyle advice. Your GP will ask you about:

- whether or not you drink alcohol or take drugs;
- your eating habits;
- the contact you have with your friends and family and activities you enjoy and are involved in; and
- if you are having trouble sleeping.

### ***Will complementary therapies help?***

Complementary therapies are techniques used to treat a disorder or disease and are used alongside traditional medicines. There is not enough evidence to say that the following treatments are effective in treating depression.

- **Acupuncture** - A Chinese medical therapy which involves having

fine needles placed into your skin to help you relax.

- **Animal-assisted therapy** - Animals are used to give people companionship and affection. Animal therapy is often used in nursing homes.
- **Aromatherapy** - A therapy based on using very strong essential oils from the flowers, leaves, bark, branches, rind or roots of plants which people think can heal illnesses.
- **Emotional-freedom technique** - A needle-free version of acupuncture. It involves tapping certain points of your body while you are thinking of a negative emotion.
- **Homeopathy** - A system which involves using diluted substances to stimulate natural defenses in the body.
- **Light therapy** - Involves exposure to bright light for a few hours a day.
- **Massage therapy** - This is manipulating soft tissues in the body – the muscles, tendons and ligaments.
- **Reflexology** - A therapy where firm pressure is applied to reflex points on the body using the thumb or fingers.
- **Reiki** - Where a therapist channels energy into your body through touch.
- **T'ai Chi** - A Chinese exercise system that uses slow body movements to help you relax your body and mind.
- **Thought-field therapy** - A technique which uses specialised tapping with the fingers at certain points on your upper body and hands.

- **Yoga** - Based on an ancient system of breathing practices. It includes exercises that aim to give you greater control of the body and mind.

## Are psychological treatments safe?

All psychological treatments could cause side effects, and it is important to know about these. Your therapist should give you advice about the positive and negative parts of all treatments. You should never be afraid to ask about the possible harmful side effects and how likely it is that the treatment will help you.

Often, people feel that a particular therapy isn't working for them but they can't explain why. This can be because the therapy deals with matters that are uncomfortable for you or, often, it is down to how comfortable you feel with your therapist.

It isn't worth continuing with a therapy that you do not think is helping you, but you should remember that treating depression can raise issues in your mind that can be unpleasant to deal with and this may show that the treatment is having a positive effect.

It is important that you have a good relationship with your therapist and feel comfortable with them. If you are not comfortable with your therapist, you should not be embarrassed about asking to see someone else.

If you feel upset after seeing your therapist or from the treatment, you should act on this straight away by talking to your friends, family, carers and healthcare professionals. We have listed some national helplines on page 22.



## What if the treatment I decide to try doesn't work?

It is important to accept that some treatments you try might not work for you straight away, but you shouldn't give up. All treatments take time to work, and while you might feel that it is hopeless you should speak to your GP or therapist before stopping any treatment.

Many people fully recover from depression. For others it is a long-term condition that comes back over time.



Most people with depression will see an improvement in symptoms following treatment, but how long this will take depends on the individual. With an agreed care plan and regular monitoring, you can find a treatment that suits you and helps with your progress.

If your symptoms don't improve, you need to try a different treatment. If you have tried a number of treatments and they don't seem to be helping, your healthcare professional can help you to change treatment or find combinations of treatments.

# Where can I find out more information?

## Helplines

### Breathing Space

**Phone: 0800 83 85 87**

Breathing Space is a free and confidential service to help you if you are feeling down or experiencing depression and need someone to talk to. Breathing Space also offers a free and confidential British Sign Language (BSL) service you can access using their website at

<http://breathingspace.scot/>

### Carers UK's advice line

**Phone: 0808 808 7777**

Carers UK's advice line is a free and confidential helpline, offering information to carers.

### NHS24

**Phone: 111**

NHS 24 can answer questions on any health matter and give you advice.

### Samaritans

**Phone: 116 123**

Samaritans is available 24 hours a day to provide confidential and emotional support if you are distressed and thinking about suicide.

## **SANeline**

**Phone: 0300 304 7000**

This is a national out-of-hours helpline offering emotional support and information for people affected by mental-health problems.

**The following organisations can give you information on particular areas of mental health. We do not accept responsibility for the information they may provide.**

### **Action on Depression**

21-23 Hill Street

Edinburgh EH2 3JP

Email: [info@actionondepression.org](mailto:info@actionondepression.org)

**Action on Depression** is a national charity for people with depression in Scotland. They offer a range of information and support including self-help groups, an information service by phone, post and email and a wide range of leaflets and fact sheets.

### **Carers Scotland**

**The Cottage, 21 Pearce Street**

**Glasgow G51 3UT**

**Phone: 0141 445 3070**

Email: [info@carerscotland.org](mailto:info@carerscotland.org) • Website: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

Carers Scotland aim to improve support for carers by giving policy makers and professionals working with carers relevant information.

## **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**

Riverview House, Friarton Road

Perth PH2 8DF

National Support Helpline 0845 600 2227

Email: [info@crusescotland.org.uk](mailto:info@crusescotland.org.uk)

Website: [www.crusescotland.org.uk](http://www.crusescotland.org.uk)

Cruse Bereavement Care offers free information and advice to people who have lost someone to help them to understand their grief and help them to cope.

## **Health Professions Council (HPC)**

Park House

184 Kennington Park Road

London SE11 4BU

Phone: 020 7582 0866

Website: [www.hcpc-uk.co.uk](http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk)

The HPC can give you the latest information and background on how healthcare professionals are regulated. They can also tell you about registered therapists who meet their standards.

## **Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)**

Brunswick House, 51 Wilson Street

Glasgow G1 1UZ

Phone: 0141 530 1000

Email: [enquire@samh.org.uk](mailto:enquire@samh.org.uk) • Website: [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

SAMH provides direct services including accommodation, support, employment and rehabilitation to people who experience mental-health problems. They also offer a range of leaflets and fact sheets on mental-health conditions.

## **'see me'**

**1/3 Great Michael House**

**14 Links Place**

**Edinburgh EH6 7EZ**

**Phone: 0131 554 0218**

**Email: [info@seemescotland.org](mailto:info@seemescotland.org) •**

**Website: [www.seemescotland.org](http://www.seemescotland.org)**

'see me' is Scotland's national campaign to end the negative image around mental-health problems and discrimination. They provide a range of fact sheets about mental health and the negative image it has.

## **Voices of Experience Scotland (VOX)**

**c/o Mental Health Foundation (Scotland)**

**5th Floor, Merchants House**

**30 George Square**

**Glasgow G2 1EG**

**Phone: 0141 572 1663**

**Email: [info@voxscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@voxscotland.org.uk) •**

**Website: [www.voxscotland.org.uk](http://www.voxscotland.org.uk)**

VOX aims to develop, support and maintain a national organisation of, for and by people who have or have had a mental-health problem. VOX offer people who have had a mental-health problem the opportunity to communicate with each other and with other organisations so they can support each to make their voice heard.

## **Helpful websites**

We do not accept responsibility for the content of the websites listed.

[www.bluepages.anu.edu.au](http://www.bluepages.anu.edu.au)

[www.lltff.com](http://www.lltff.com)

[www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)

[www.moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome)

[www.moodcafe.co.uk](http://www.moodcafe.co.uk)

[www.healthscotland.org.uk/smhfa/](http://www.healthscotland.org.uk/smhfa/)

## **Financial information and practical issues**

[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions)

[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

Space for your notes

## Space for your notes



## Other formats

If you would like a copy of this booklet in another language or format, please phone Karen Graham, Patient Involvement Officer, on 0131 623 4740, or e-mail her at [karen.graham2@nhs.net](mailto:karen.graham2@nhs.net)

This booklet is based on a clinical guideline issued to all NHS staff.

You can download the full clinical guideline from our website at [www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/sign114.pdf](http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/sign114.pdf)

A short version is also available at [www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/qrg114.pdf](http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/qrg114.pdf)

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Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Gyle Square,  
1 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9EB

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