

Ageing Well
A 10 Minute Guide

HSC Public Health Agency

Age Friendly

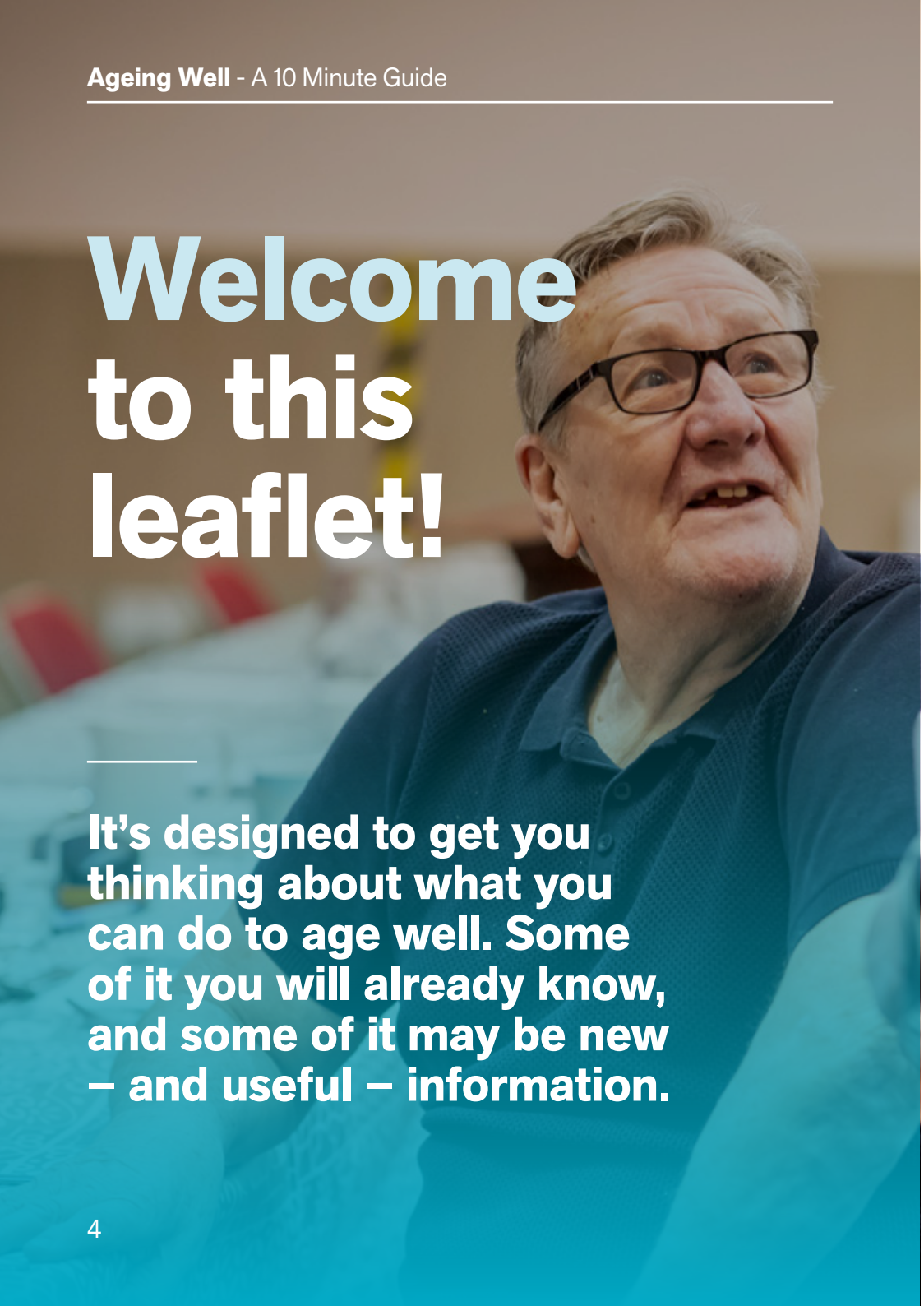
With thanks to Lady Mary Peters, who is shown on the front of this leaflet in her capacity as an Ambassador for Age NI.

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Welcome to this leaflet!

It's designed to get you thinking about what you can do to age well. Some of it you will already know, and some of it may be new – and useful – information.

Getting older can be a very rewarding experience.

You might find you have more time for yourself as adult children leave home, and you retire from work. You may enjoy newfound freedom and opportunities. You might discover new interests or hobbies and make new friends.

It can also be a challenging time. Retirement can mean less money, and caring for children can be replaced by caring for parents or a partner.

You might also feel less fit than when you were younger, or have concerns about your health or the health of your family.

You may have experienced bereavement, and feel sad or lonely.

Whatever situation you find yourself in, there are certain things you can do to help keep you healthy and happy. Eating well, keeping active, and staying in touch with people can all make a big difference.

This leaflet contains tips on all these things.

Please share this with your friends and family, and chat to them about any changes you – or they – might want to make!



Do you... eat well?

There are so many things we can do as we age to keep our body in good condition.

As we get older our sense of thirst gets weaker so you may not feel thirsty very often. But **water** is vital for our bodies to work properly so it's important to drink plenty.

Not drinking enough can make you feel tired and irritable, give you headaches or make you constipated. Drink six to eight cups of liquid a day. This can include cups of tea or coffee. Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink!

You may also find as you age that you have less of an appetite and are tempted to skip meals and snack on foods that don't nourish you. That can make you feel tired.

Eating well can help you feel more energetic and happier!

As we get older, **Protein** is very important. It helps keep your muscles strong so you can keep doing your daily activities, and continue to live independently. It also helps our bodies recover from illness or injuries. You should include some protein with every meal. Meat, eggs, beans, fish, nuts and lentils all contain protein. If you do tend to snack, aim for snacks that include protein, like cheese and crackers, or nuts.

Including **calcium** in your daily diet will help keep your bones strong. Milk and cheese (or cottage cheese) contain lots of calcium.

Vitamin D is also important to keep your bones and muscles healthy.

Anyone over 65 should take 10 micrograms a day. You can buy vitamin D supplements from your local pharmacist or supermarket. Expensive ones may not be better: choose one that is as close to 10 micrograms as possible.

Older people may have lower levels of **Vitamin B12.** This vitamin helps give you energy. You can get it by eating lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs or milk, or foods fortified with B12 (e.g. breakfast cereals).

People who eat plenty of **fruit and vegetables** are less likely to develop heart disease and certain cancers. You should eat 5 different fruit and vegetables a day.

You need **starchy** foods like bread, breakfast cereal, potatoes, rice or pasta to give you energy.

Wholegrain foods such as brown rice or wholegrain bread or pasta are especially good for you, and help prevent constipation.

Eating too many foods high in fat, salt and sugar, like cakes and biscuits, increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Is there anything you could do to improve your diet?

Eating healthy food doesn't have to be expensive: eggs and tinned fish are both excellent and affordable sources of protein; lentils are cheap and can be added to soups and stews; fruits and vegetables that are "in season" are often cheaper. You can save money by cooking larger amounts, and freezing some to reheat later. To save on fuel costs, microwaves and air fryers can be great alternatives to the oven.

To browse short videos on healthy eating, use your phone to read this QR code.



Do you... keep active?

One of the best things you can do to keep healthy, is keep active.

When you keep active as you get older, you make it more likely that you will be able to live longer without being dependent on friends, family or healthcare staff to do basic things like dress and feed yourself.

You should aim to do aerobic movements most days of the week. This is movement which makes you breathe a little faster, though you should still be able to talk while doing it. Walking and swimming are both great.

Strength and Balance
It is also important to do things that help to keep your muscles, bones and joints strong (carrying shopping home; yoga; gym-based activities; gardening) and things that help to improve your balance (bowling, dancing, Tai Chi) at least 2 days a week.

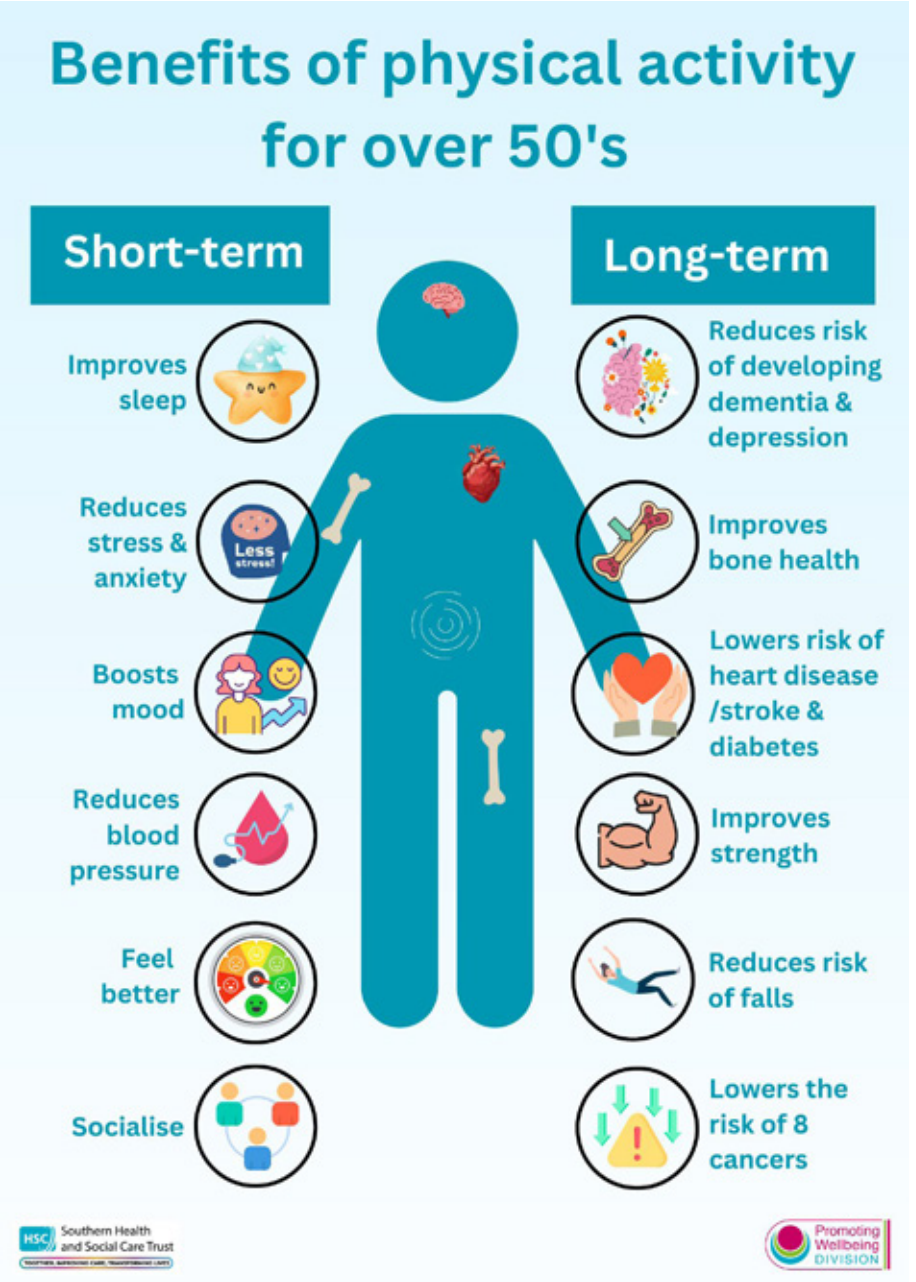
Some leisure centres and community centres offer Strength and Balance classes especially designed for older people – contact your local centres to find out more.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy have made a 4 minute video showing strength and balance exercises you can do at home:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8s-8KtfgFM

Sitting still for long periods of time is bad for your health. If you are at home all day, try to move around regularly. If you're watching TV, stand up in the ad breaks. If you're making a cup of tea, walk around the kitchen or do some stretches while the kettle is boiling.

It is never too late to start.
Some movement is good, more is better and every minute counts towards your health.

If you have limited mobility, the Move with Mary video and booklet show you a range of chair-based exercises.
www.ageni.org/information-advice/looking-after-yourself/movewithmary/





Do you... take care of your mental health?

There are five simple steps you can do to help maintain and improve your mental health and sense of wellbeing. These are sometimes referred to as Take 5. Doing these five things regularly can make a real difference to how you feel:

1 Connect:

Connect with the people around you: family, friends and neighbours, or people in your local community. Think of these relationships as the cornerstones of your life, and spend time developing them.

(See pages 20-23 for more ideas for how to connect with others).

2 Be active:

Movement changes your brain and makes you feel happier. Find an activity that you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

3 Take Notice:

Stop, pause, or take a moment to look around you. What can you see, feel, smell or even taste? Look for beautiful, new, unusual or extraordinary things in your everyday life and think about how that makes you feel.

4 Keep Learning:

Why not try something new, rediscover an old hobby, or sign up for a course? Learn how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy! Learning new things can make you feel more confident, as well as being fun to do.

5 Give:

Do something nice for a friend or a stranger, thank someone, smile, or volunteer your time. Seeing yourself and your happiness linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

For more information on looking after your mental health, visit:
www.mindingyourhead.info





Do you... want to help others?

Older people make terrific volunteers. They often have time to help others, as well as wisdom and compassion.

There are always organisations looking for new volunteers, and lots of different roles you can play.

You could:

- Befriend people.
- Help others with occasional gardening or shopping.
- Drive people to groups or appointments.
- Get involved with one-off activities, like a beach clean-up or a community planting day.
- Support local or international events, like the Balmoral Show or the North West 200.
- Browse a calendar of events and find one near you at at www.volunteernow.co.uk/volunteering/events/

For more information, visit Volunteer Now at www.volunteernow.co.uk or ring 028 90232020.

Or call into your local charity shop and ask about helping out there sometimes.

You can volunteer as few or as many hours as you like.



Do you… keep connected?

Around 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland say they feel lonely often or sometimes.

When you are older and feel lonely, doing something about it can seem really hard.
But there are lots of great opportunities to connect with people around you.

- Ring, or go and see, someone you haven't spoken to for a while. Remember that other people you know probably feel lonely sometimes too, and if you reach out to them, you will be helping them.
- Check with your local community centre what is on: many have arts and crafts groups or walking groups.
- Invite someone who lives near you to go for a walk.
- Contact your local college to ask about adult education classes.
- Take a trip to your local library; many libraries organise group activities.

- If you're a man, you could join a Men's Shed. There are over 100 Men's Sheds across Northern Ireland. Activities are varied, and can be as simple as sitting down for a cup of tea and a biscuit, or can include learning new skills.

  To find out about Mens Sheds in your area, or for advice or information on starting up your own Mens Shed (or Hens Shed!), visit Groundwork NI at at www.groundwork.org.uk/mens-sheds/

- If you live in a rural area, you may be able to access a community transport scheme. If you live in an urban area, and have a disability that prevents you from using mainstream public transport, you may also be able to use community transport.

  To find out more, go to www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/community-transport-and-shopmobility-schemes

- Very small, brief interactions with other people are also good for your health.

- Just smiling or saying hello to someone in the street, or having a chat about the weather with someone in a shop, can lift your mood and make you feel good.





Do you... care for someone who is dependent?

Carers provide vital care for people who cannot look after themselves independently. Many carers in Northern Ireland are over 65.

Caring for someone you love can be rewarding, but it can also be difficult to look after your own wellbeing. You may find you are so busy being a carer that you lose contact with friends and people around you. You may also find it tricky to navigate services and support from time to time.

There are services which provide respite activities and support groups for carers - if you are caring for someone, and starting to feel lonely or overwhelmed, think about reaching out to them, or to someone you already know.

If you are a carer, no matter what age you are, you may be eligible for financial support, for example a carer's allowance or help with bills.

Contact Carers NI to find out more about relevant groups and services.

Website:
www.carersuk.org/NI

Helpline:
0808 808 7777
(Monday to Friday, 9am–6pm)

Email:
advice@carersuk.org



Do you... keep your home safe?

More accidents happen in the home than anywhere else. Making yourself familiar with some of the home safety hazards can help you prevent them.

- Ensure your home is well-lit.
- Always turn lights on in the evenings, or when you get up at night.
- Remove tripping hazards like loose or worn mats.
- Clutter on stairs is a tripping hazard. Don't leave things on stairs that you could trip over.
- Keep floors dry to prevent slipping.
- If you use non-slip bath or shower mats, clean them regularly to avoid them becoming slippery with soap residue.
- Use the back rings on your cooker hob and don't leave pans unattended.
- Keep the handles of pans turned inward, away from the edge of the stove, to avoid knocking against them.

The Public Health Agency supports local Councils to offer free home safety checks for people aged 65 and over. A trained officer can visit your home, identify potential hazards, and provide advice. For more information, contact your local Council.

Fire safety

- Don't overload sockets: kettles, toasters, heaters, irons, microwaves should be plugged directly into the wall, not into an adapter.
- Make sure you have working smoke alarms – test yours once a week.
- Beware of old, damaged or faulty electric blankets.
- Only leave a blanket switched on all night if it has a setting for safe all-night use.
- Do not use hot water bottles along with an electric blanket as this could cause electrocution.
- Check older appliances for frayed or damaged leads, and replace any that don't look right.

Include these in your bedtime routine:

- Disconnect electrical appliances before you go to bed. Only leave on ones that are suitable to be left on 24/7 (like your fridge or freezer).
- Close all internal doors. Closed doors help prevent the spread of fire and smoke.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service offer free Home Fire Safety Checks to people who are over 50. Uniformed officers will check that existing smoke alarms operate, and install new smoke alarms if needed. They will also provide you with tailored fire safety advice.

Email prevention@nifrs.org for more information or to request a free Home Fire Safety Check.



These are just a few tips. You can find many more, including tips on changes you can make to your home before children come to visit, to help keep them safe:



Do you... take care to avoid falls?

Falling can lead to injuries, which can impact on your independence. Many falls are avoidable.

The information in this leaflet on keeping active, eating well (especially eating dairy and taking a vitamin D supplement), and taking home safety precautions are all important things you can do to help you avoid falling.

Doing Strength and Balance activities at least twice a week is proven to help prevent falls! (See page 12).

Other things you can do, which will help make you less likely to fall include:

- **Get your eyesight tested**
  Good vision has a major role in how you keep your balance. Get your eyes tested regularly - every 2 years (or more if you think your eyesight is changing, or if you have glaucoma)

  If your optician recommends glasses, wear them as recommended and keep them clean. Be especially sure to wear them when you get up at night!

  Eye tests are free for everyone over the age of 60.

- **Get your hearing tested**
  Hearing loss can make you more likely to fall. If you have difficulty with your hearing, tell your GP. If you have hearing aids, make sure you wear them, keep them clean, and get regular hearing check-ups.
- **Avoid taking risks**
  Try not to rush, or get up too quickly. Avoid overreaching or standing on chairs. Never take unnecessary risks – stop, think, and ask for help if you need it.
- **Check your footwear**
  Always wear footwear which fits you well and is comfortable and supportive. Avoid loose slippers or footwear without backs - these can make you more likely to fall.
- **Take extra care if you have had a drink**
  Even small amounts of alcohol can make you less coordinated and make balancing harder. If you have been drinking, you are more at risk of falling.
- **Take care with your medicines**
  Take your medications as prescribed, but if you think they are making you unsteady, tell your GP or a pharmacist. Drinking alcohol when you are on medication can make you more unsteady.





Do you... reduce your risk of dementia?

Age is the biggest risk factor for dementia and there is no guaranteed way to avoid getting it. However, research suggests that nearly half of all dementia cases could be prevented or delayed by reducing certain risk factors.

The most important things you can do are

- **Stay connected (see pages 20-23)** Recent research suggests that having positive connections with other people as you get older may play a vital role in reducing dementia risk.
- **Get your hearing checked.** Hearing loss is related to an increased risk of developing dementia. If you have hearing aids, wear them: this can reduce your risk of dementia to the level of a person with normal hearing
- **Manage long-term conditions:** high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes are all linked to an increased risk of dementia.

Other ways you can reduce or delay your risk of dementia include:

- Get your eyes checked and wear your glasses.
- Keep moving (see pages 10-13). Keeping active is a good way to reduce your risk!
- Look after your mental health (see pages 14-16).
- Don't smoke – and if you do smoke, give up. Studies show that you're four times more likely to quit with help, and there's a free local stop-smoking service near you. Visit www.stopsmokingni.info
- Keep your alcohol consumption low – below 14 units a week. A medium glass of wine or a pint of beer are around 2.5 units. For more information on units, visit www.drugsandalcoholni.info/alcohol-units/
- Maintain a healthy weight: obesity can increase the risk.
- Keep your brain active - try activities that stimulate your mind.

The earlier you start reducing your risk, the better – but it is never too late!



If you are concerned you or someone you know may have signs of dementia, and would like information or support, you can call the Alzheimers Society Helpline at 0333 150 3456 or contact Dementia NI at info@dementiani.org or on (028) 9693 1555.

Do you want more information or advice?

Age NI provide free advice and information on a wide range of areas. They provide this support to thousands of older people every year.

You can call their advice service on Freephone 0808 808 7575 (Monday – Friday 9am–5pm). Or you can email them at advice@ageni.org

Age NI also support a network of groups to strengthen the voice of older people. Find out about your local groups at www.ageni.org/services/age-sector/age-sector-networks/

Across Northern Ireland there are lots of excellent services and events which can help you stay happy, healthy and connected.

Each local Council has an Age Friendly Coordinator who can signpost you to these services.

You can contact them by ringing your local Council (see the numbers on the right) and asking to speak to the Age Friendly Coordinator.

Age Friendly Coordinator in each local Council Area:

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Tel: 028 9034 0160

Ards & North Down Borough Council
Tel: 0300 013 3333
ext. 40209

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Tel: 07825 010 630

Belfast City Council
Tel: 07827 823 998

Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council
Tel. 07542 614 665

Derry City and Strabane District Council
Tel: 028 7125 3253

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Tel: 0300 303 1777
Extension: 20224

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Tel: 028 9244 7300

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Tel: 028 2826 2353

Mid Ulster District Council
Tel: 07553 379 721

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
Tel: 0330 137 4024

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Notes

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