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# Understanding Clinical Hypnotherapy

by Judith E. Pearson, PhD

## What is Hypnosis or Trance?

Hypnosis is a method of communication that induces a trance or a trance-like state. Hypnosis can be conducted by one individual addressing another, or it may be conducted with the self (self-hypnosis). Trance is a naturally occurring state in which one's attention is narrowly focused and relatively free of distractions. The attention may be focused either internally (on thoughts---internal self-talk or images or both) or externally (on a task, a book, or a movie, for example). The focus of attention is so narrow that other stimuli in the environment are ignored or blocked out of conscious awareness for a time. Examples of trance states are daydreaming and some forms of meditation.



As an adjunct to psychotherapy, hypnosis can help clients enter a relaxed, comfortable, trance state for obtaining specific therapeutic outcomes. With clinical hypnosis, the therapist can make suggestions designed to help the client formulate specific internal processes (feelings, memories, images and internal self-talk) that will lead to mutually-agreed-upon outcomes.

Hypnotic suggestions can influence behavior when the listener is

- (a) relaxed, receptive and open to the suggestions
- (b) experiences visual, auditory, and/or kinesthetic representations of the suggestions
- (c) anticipates and envisions that these suggestions will result in future outcomes.

These three criteria are facilitated through the use of "hypnotic language patterns." Hypnotic language patterns include: guided visualization, stories, guided memories, analogies, ambiguous words or phrases, repetition, and statements about association, meaning, and cause-effect.

## Myths and Misconceptions about Hypnosis

Hypnosis is not mind control or brainwashing. People change their minds and actions throughout their lives. When such changes occur as a result of exposure to specific information, it is because this information has been presented through persuasion and influence. A hypnotherapist uses communicative methods of persuasion and influence; so do people who

advertise and market goods and services; so do teachers, politicians, lawyers, entertainers, parents, and ministers.

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During trance, you are not immobilized. You know exactly where you are the entire time. You can adjust your position, scratch, sneeze, or cough. You can open your eyes and bring yourself out of trance at any time you wish. During trance, you can still hear sounds around you, like a phone ringing. You can alert yourself and respond to any situation that needs your immediate attention. You remain oriented as to person, place, and time. You can even hold a conversation in trance.

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Trance is not sleep, although some people get so relaxed in trance that they may fall asleep. This is no problem because some part of the mind continues to listen to the voice of the hypnoterapist. In trance, sleeping subjects can still follow instructions such as moving a finger, taking a deep breath, or awakening themselves when they are told to do so.

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There is no "right" way to experience trance. One person may experience it as a deep, heavy restful feeling, while another may experience it as a light, floating sensation. Some people hear every word spoken by the therapist, while others allow their minds to drift to other thoughts. Some experience vivid imagery, while others do not. Some people remember the suggestions they hear, and some do not. Every person's experience of hypnosis is unique.

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Hypnosis cannot cause anyone to do something against their will or that contradicts their values. First, a hypnoterapist is ethically required to make only those suggestions that support agreed-upon outcomes. Second, clients are not receptive to suggestions that go against their morals or values---because receptivity is one of the ingredients of success in hypnosis.

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Remember: hypnosis cannot solve every problem. Even with hypnosis, it may still be necessary for you to do some conscientious planning and research about the types of changes you want to achieve. You must still take action to get results. Hypnosis is not a cure-all. Hypnosis can be effective in many cases, but there are no guarantees that hypnosis will work for you.

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## Risks and Precautions

Hypnosis carries very few risks. Hypnosis may be contraindicated for individuals with certain medical problems, or who are actively abusing drugs or alcohol, or who are delusional or hallucinatory. Hypnosis should not be used for physical problems, such as pain, unless the client has first consulted a physician to determine underlying physical causes.

Formal hypnotic methods are not recommended for small children, because children lack the necessary attention span. More interactive treatment methods can be used, however, such as art therapy, play therapy, storytelling, and guided visualization, during which helpful suggestions can be made to the child.

Hypnosis is often requested for the purpose of uncovering childhood memories. Hypnosis may or may not work in this regard. When memories do surface, the client may have a "false memory" and there is no guarantee that such memories are accurate or based on reality. Such memories may be uncomfortable and distressing, but not always.

Sometimes after trancework, the client may feel somewhat disoriented. The therapist and the client can work together to make sure the client is fully alert and energized sufficiently to leave the therapist's office and continue the day's activity. In very rare cases, after a hypnotic session, and client may experience mildly disturbing thoughts or feelings. If this happens, the client should call the therapist immediately for a follow-up session.

## Ericksonian Hypnosis

The kind of hypnotherapy most frequently practiced in psychotherapy today is "Ericksonian Hypnosis," named after the late Milton H. Erickson, M.D. From the 1930's to the 1980's Dr. Erickson was very influential in bringing the use of clinical hypnosis into the fields of medicine and psychotherapy. He taught and practiced a kind of hypnosis that was gentle, permissive, and respectful of the client. He established the National Association for Clinical Hypnosis and published the first professional journals and monographs on the therapeutic uses of hypnosis. The Ericksonian Foundation continues his work. Hundreds of books and articles have been written about Dr. Erickson and his methods. Dr. Erickson has been regarded as the leading hypnotherapist in the world.

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## Credentialing of Hypnotherapists

A hypnotherapist is a licensed or certified mental health professional who has obtained specialized, post graduate training and certification in the use of clinical hypnosis within the context of counseling, psychotherapy, or other medical specialty.

### About the author:

Judy Pearson, Ph.D. is a licensed professional counselor and has a private practice in Springfield, Virginia. Her phone number is 703-764-0753. She is certified in clinical hypnosis and neuro-linguistic programming. She offers individual counseling and therapy for adults in the following areas: stress and depression, fear of public speaking, sexual problems, pain management, health concerns, survivor issues, phobias and anxiety, low self-esteem, habit control, sleep disorders and relationship issues. She works to eliminate blocks to motivation, creativity, and self-confidence. Please visit her web site at [www.engagethepower.com](http://www.engagethepower.com).



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Carol Ginandes puts down many myths about hypnosis. 'People don't go into a zombie-like state where they can be made to do things against their will,' she says. (Staff photo by Stephanie Mitchell)

## Hypnosis helps healing:

### *Surgical wounds mend faster*

**By William J. Cromie**

Gazette Staff

Marie McBrown was invited to test whether or not hypnosis would help heal the scars from her breast surgery. Marie (not her real name) and 17 other women underwent surgery to reduce their breast size.

It's a common operation for women whose breasts are large enough to cause back and shoulder strain, interfere with routine tasks, or prompt social and psychological problems. The pain and course of healing from such surgery is well-known, and a team of researchers headed by Carol Ginandes of Harvard Medical School and Patricia Brooks of the Union Institute in Cincinnati wanted to determine if hypnosis could speed wound healing and recovery.

"Hypnosis has been used in Western medicine for more than 150 years to treat everything from anxiety to pain, from easing the nausea of cancer chemotherapy to enhancing sports performance," Ginandes says. A list of applications she provides includes treatment of phobias, panic, low self-esteem, insomnia, sexual dysfunction, stress, smoking, colitis, warts, headaches, and high blood pressure.

"All these functional uses may help a person feel better," Ginandes continues. "I am also interested in using hypnosis to help people get better physically. That means using the mind to make structural changes in the body, to accelerate healing at the tissue level."

Four years ago, Ginandes and Daniel Rosenthal, professor of radiology at the Harvard Medical School, published a report on their study of hypnosis to speed up the mending of broken bones. They recruited 12 people with broken ankles who did not require surgery and who received the usual treatment at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. In addition, Ginandes hypnotized half of them once a week for 12 weeks, while the other half received only normal treatment. The same doctor applied the casts and other care, and the same radiologists took regular X-rays to monitor how well they healed. A radiologist who evaluated the X-rays did not know which patients underwent hypnosis.

The result stood out like a sore ankle. Those who were hypnotized healed faster than those who were not. Six weeks after the fracture, those in the hypnosis group showed the equivalent of eight and a half weeks of healing.

## **How to hypnotize**

Not everyone is convinced by the results. Some experts claim that the differences can be explained by the extra attention - the increased psychological support - given to the hypnotized patients. So when she was ready to try hypnosis again on 18 breast surgery patients, Ginandes randomly separated them into three groups. All got the same surgical care by the same doctors. Six received standard care only, six also received attention and support and from a psychologist, and six underwent hypnosis before and after their surgery.

Hypnosis sessions occurred once a week for eight weeks. Psychological soothing took place on the same schedule.

Ginandes did not put the patients to sleep by swinging a watch like a pendulum while the patients lay on a couch. "That only happens in the movies," she laughs. "In hypnosis, people don't lose control and go into a zombie-like state where they can be made to do things against their will. They don't have to lie down, you can enter a state of hypnosis standing up, even standing on your head. Patients don't even go to sleep, rather, they enter a state of absorbed awareness, not unlike losing oneself in a good book or favorite piece of music."

While in this state, Ginandes offered suggestions that were custom-tailored to different stages of surgery and healing. Before surgery, the suggestions emphasized lessening pain and anxiety. "You can even suggest to a patient that she can reduce bleeding during surgery by controlling her blood flow," Ginandes notes. Overall, the suggestions focused on things such as expectation of comfort, decreased inflammation, diminished scar tissue, accelerated wound healing, return to normal activities, and adjustments to self-image.

The women received audio tapes of these sessions so they could practice at home.

At one week and seven weeks after surgery, nurses and doctors participating in the study visibly assessed and measured the wounds of all three groups without knowing which group the women were in. They took digital photographs for three physicians to review. Each patient also rated her own healing progress and how much pain she felt on scales of zero to 10.

The result was clear. Marie McBrown and the women who had undergone hypnosis healed significantly faster than the others. Those who received supportive attention came in second.

From hooey to hurrah

The researchers reported these results in the April issue of the American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis. This report, of course, doesn't prove conclusively that hypnosis will accelerate the healing of wounds. The biggest limitation of the study involves the small number of patients, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to other types of wounds. Then there is the possible effect of expectation, the belief of some patients that hypnotism will work. It's the same effect seen when people who take a sugar pill for a backache do as well as people who take medicine. It's going to require more studies involving many more people to get the majority of doctors to shout hurrah instead of hooey.

Ginandes agrees. "Our study underscores the need for further scientific testing of hypnosis," she says. "Subsequent studies might clarify unresolved speculations about the mechanisms by which hypnotic suggestion can trigger the physical and psychological effects that we see."

She and her colleagues suggest future experiments to compare the effects of simple hypnotic relaxation versus "targeted suggestions for tissue healing." They would also like to see more work done using hypnosis for people suffering from other kinds of wounds, such as foot ulcers caused by diabetes.

Nevertheless, Ginandes believes that the study of healing after breast surgery "breaks the ground for studying a broad and exciting range of new adjunctive treatments. Since clinical hypnosis is a noninvasive, nondrug treatment, finding that it can speed healing of wounds and other conditions could lead to fewer visits to doctors' offices and faster return to normal activities. Also, further investigation might confirm our supposition that the mind can influence healing of the body."





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## What is Hypnosis?

There is no definite dividing line between a normal waking state and a hypnotic or trance state. Examples of alterations in consciousness occur frequently and most people experience some of them. Both children and adults can become so absorbed in daydreaming that they lose track of what is going on around them. Some people consciously use daydreams to divert themselves from certain aspects of their existence. When someone is concentrating intently on a work project, the hyperfocusing that aids the work may also shut out noises and other distractions. Someone who is absorbed in an activity may, when the activity ends, need to take a moment to reorient to the external world.

**What hypnosis is not:** Sleep. Adults who are hypnotized often prefer to have their eyes closed. This is not necessary in order to have a deep trance state. In fact, many children prefer to have their eyes open and even to walk around during hypnosis. While in hypnosis, one's attention and concentration is more focused. During sleep, this is not usually the case. EEG patterns during hypnosis and during sleep differ. Hypnosis is intense focused concentration, with the partial or complete exclusion of awareness of peripheral phenomenon. Some feel that individuals who are able to become intensely absorbed in an activity or daydreaming make the best hypnotic subjects. Hypnotic or trance states can occur spontaneously both inside the therapy room and in every day life.

Individuals may feel disappointed and say, "I didn't feel like I was under hypnosis." They expect their eyes to close automatically and expect to feel a floating or tired state. Despite this, within a few days, their target symptoms seem to get better. This may actually be good hypnotic treatment. Individuals experience trance in their own way. Many, particularly children, do not close their eyes or even remain seated, during the hypnosis. Some people may continue their work consciously or unconsciously after they leave the session. Other individuals consider medical hypnosis a failure because they have unrealistic expectations or goals. While hypnosis may be the primary treatment of choice for certain symptoms and disorders, it is often appropriate as an adjunct to other biological or psychotherapeutic techniques.

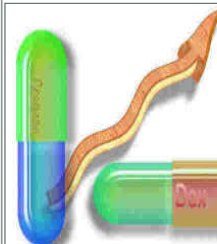
## Medical versus "Amateur" Hypnosis

When I explain hypnosis to a new patient, I often have to explain how my procedures differ clinically and ethically from amateur stage hypnosis. Stage hypnosis depends on a certain amount of peer pressure and a given individual's conscious or unconscious wishes to perform. Frequently it is not done with consideration for the subject's needs or vulnerabilities. I see hypnosis as a specific medical or psychological procedure that should be done within the context of a therapeutic relationship. Recently a clinician from another state asked for advice about branching out from clinical hypnosis to hypnosis for public entertainment. I advised her to avoid this completely. It is important for licensed mental health practitioners to use care in determining the appropriate venue for hypnosis.

## Indications for Medical Hypnosis

**Pain:** Some patients worry that if hypnosis helps their pain that it means that the pain in "all in my head." Actually, that is true because ALL pain is mediated through the brain. Pain related to surgery or medical conditions such as shingles can respond well to hypnosis. I usually work with the patient to build in safeguards so that he or she will be alerted to any change or increase in the pain.

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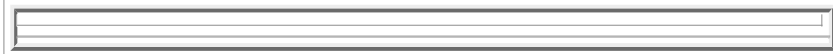


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Carol Watkins, M.D.

Glenn Brynes, Ph.D., M.D.

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A hypnotherapist is a licensed or certified mental health professional who has obtained specialized, post graduate training and certification in the use of clinical hypnosis within the context of counseling, psychotherapy, or other medical specialty.

### About the author:

Judy Pearson, Ph.D. is a licensed professional counselor and has a private practice in Springfield, Virginia. Her phone number is 703-764-0753. She is certified in clinical hypnosis and neuro-linguistic programming. She offers individual counseling and therapy for adults in the following areas: stress and depression, fear of public speaking, sexual problems, pain management, health concerns, survivor issues, phobias and anxiety, low self-esteem, habit control, sleep disorders and relationship issues. She works to eliminate blocks to motivation, creativity, and self-confidence. Please visit her web site at [www.engagethepower.com](http://www.engagethepower.com).



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Carol Ginandes puts down many myths about hypnosis. 'People don't go into a zombie-like state where they can be made to do things against their will,' she says. (Staff photo by Stephanie Mitchell)

## Hypnosis helps healing:

### *Surgical wounds mend faster*

**By William J. Cromie**

Gazette Staff

Marie McBrown was invited to test whether or not hypnosis would help heal the scars from her breast surgery. Marie (not her real name) and 17 other women underwent surgery to reduce their breast size.

It's a common operation for women whose breasts are large enough to cause back and shoulder strain, interfere with routine tasks, or prompt social and psychological problems. The pain and course of healing from such surgery is well-known, and a team of researchers headed by Carol Ginandes of Harvard Medical School and Patricia Brooks of the Union Institute in Cincinnati wanted to determine if hypnosis could speed wound healing and recovery.

"Hypnosis has been used in Western medicine for more than 150 years to treat everything from anxiety to pain, from easing the nausea of cancer chemotherapy to enhancing sports performance," Ginandes says. A list of applications she provides includes treatment of phobias, panic, low self-esteem, insomnia, sexual dysfunction, stress, smoking, colitis, warts, headaches, and high blood pressure.

"All these functional uses may help a person feel better," Ginandes continues. "I am also interested in using hypnosis to help people get better physically. That means using the mind to make structural changes in the body, to accelerate healing at the tissue level."

Four years ago, Ginandes and Daniel Rosenthal, professor of radiology at the Harvard Medical School, published a report on their study of hypnosis to speed up the mending of broken bones. They recruited 12 people with broken ankles who did not require surgery and who received the usual treatment at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. In addition, Ginandes hypnotized half of them once a week for 12 weeks, while the other half received only normal treatment. The same doctor applied the casts and other care, and the same radiologists took regular X-rays to monitor how well they healed. A radiologist who evaluated the X-rays did not know which patients underwent hypnosis.

The result stood out like a sore ankle. Those who were hypnotized healed faster than those who were not. Six weeks after the fracture, those in the hypnosis group showed the equivalent of eight and a half weeks of healing.

## **How to hypnotize**

Not everyone is convinced by the results. Some experts claim that the differences can be explained by the extra attention - the increased psychological support - given to the hypnotized patients. So when she was ready to try hypnosis again on 18 breast surgery patients, Ginandes randomly separated them into three groups. All got the same surgical care by the same doctors. Six received standard care only, six also received attention and support and from a psychologist, and six underwent hypnosis before and after their surgery.

Hypnosis sessions occurred once a week for eight weeks. Psychological soothing took place on the same schedule.

Ginandes did not put the patients to sleep by swinging a watch like a pendulum while the patients lay on a couch. "That only happens in the movies," she laughs. "In hypnosis, people don't lose control and go into a zombie-like state where they can be made to do things against their will. They don't have to lie down, you can enter a state of hypnosis standing up, even standing on your head. Patients don't even go to sleep, rather, they enter a state of absorbed awareness, not unlike losing oneself in a good book or favorite piece of music."

While in this state, Ginandes offered suggestions that were custom-tailored to different stages of surgery and healing. Before surgery, the suggestions emphasized lessening pain and anxiety. "You can even suggest to a patient that she can reduce bleeding during surgery by controlling her blood flow," Ginandes notes. Overall, the suggestions focused on things such as expectation of comfort, decreased inflammation, diminished scar tissue, accelerated wound healing, return to normal activities, and adjustments to self-image.

The women received audio tapes of these sessions so they could practice at home.

At one week and seven weeks after surgery, nurses and doctors participating in the study visibly assessed and measured the wounds of all three groups without knowing which group the women were in. They took digital photographs for three physicians to review. Each patient also rated her own healing progress and how much pain she felt on scales of zero to 10.

The result was clear. Marie McBrown and the women who had undergone hypnosis healed significantly faster than the others. Those who received supportive attention came in second.

From hooey to hurrah

The researchers reported these results in the April issue of the American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis. This report, of course, doesn't prove conclusively that hypnosis will accelerate the healing of wounds. The biggest limitation of the study involves the small number of patients, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to other types of wounds. Then there is the possible effect of expectation, the belief of some patients that hypnotism will work. It's the same effect seen when people who take a sugar pill for a backache do as well as people who take medicine. It's going to require more studies involving many more people to get the majority of doctors to shout hurrah instead of hooey.

Ginandes agrees. "Our study underscores the need for further scientific testing of hypnosis," she says. "Subsequent studies might clarify unresolved speculations about the mechanisms by which hypnotic suggestion can trigger the physical and psychological effects that we see."

She and her colleagues suggest future experiments to compare the effects of simple hypnotic relaxation versus "targeted suggestions for tissue healing." They would also like to see more work done using hypnosis for people suffering from other kinds of wounds, such as foot ulcers caused by diabetes.

Nevertheless, Ginandes believes that the study of healing after breast surgery "breaks the ground for studying a broad and exciting range of new adjunctive treatments. Since clinical hypnosis is a noninvasive, nondrug treatment, finding that it can speed healing of wounds and other conditions could lead to fewer visits to doctors' offices and faster return to normal activities. Also, further investigation might confirm our supposition that the mind can influence healing of the body."





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## Medical Hypnosis--Uses, Techniques, and Contraindications of Hypnotherapy

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## What is Hypnosis?

There is no definite dividing line between a normal waking state and a hypnotic or trance state. Examples of alterations in consciousness occur frequently and most people experience some of them. Both children and adults can become so absorbed in daydreaming that they lose track of what is going on around them. Some people consciously use daydreams to divert themselves from certain aspects of their existence. When someone is concentrating intently on a work project, the hyperfocusing that aids the work may also shut out noises and other distractions. Someone who is absorbed in an activity may, when the activity ends, need to take a moment to reorient to the external world.

**What hypnosis is not:** Sleep. Adults who are hypnotized often prefer to have their eyes closed. This is not necessary in order to have a deep trance state. In fact, many children prefer to have their eyes open and even to walk around during hypnosis. While in hypnosis, one's attention and concentration is more focused. During sleep, this is not usually the case. EEG patterns during hypnosis and during sleep differ. Hypnosis is intense focused concentration, with the partial or complete exclusion of awareness of peripheral phenomenon. Some feel that individuals who are able to become intensely absorbed in an activity or daydreaming make the best hypnotic subjects. Hypnotic or trance states can occur spontaneously both inside the therapy room and in every day life.

Individuals may feel disappointed and say, "I didn't feel like I was under hypnosis." They expect their eyes to close automatically and expect to feel a floating or tired state. Despite this, within a few days, their target symptoms seem to get better. This may actually be good hypnotic treatment. Individuals experience trance in their own way. Many, particularly children, do not close their eyes or even remain seated, during the hypnosis. Some people may continue their work consciously or unconsciously after they leave the session. Other individuals consider medical hypnosis a failure because they have unrealistic expectations or goals. While hypnosis may be the primary treatment of choice for certain symptoms and disorders, it is often appropriate as an adjunct to other biological or psychotherapeutic techniques.

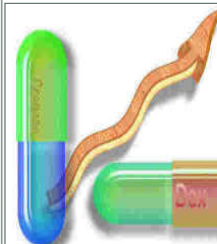
## Medical versus "Amateur" Hypnosis

When I explain hypnosis to a new patient, I often have to explain how my procedures differ clinically and ethically from amateur stage hypnosis. Stage hypnosis depends on a certain amount of peer pressure and a given individual's conscious or unconscious wishes to perform. Frequently it is not done with consideration for the subject's needs or vulnerabilities. I see hypnosis as a specific medical or psychological procedure that should be done within the context of a therapeutic relationship. Recently a clinician from another state asked for advice about branching out from clinical hypnosis to hypnosis for public entertainment. I advised her to avoid this completely. It is important for licensed mental health practitioners to use care in determining the appropriate venue for hypnosis.

## Indications for Medical Hypnosis

**Pain:** Some patients worry that if hypnosis helps their pain that it means that the pain in "all in my head." Actually, that is true because ALL pain is mediated through the brain. Pain related to surgery or medical conditions such as shingles can respond well to hypnosis. I usually work with the patient to build in safeguards so that he or she will be alerted to any change or increase in the pain.

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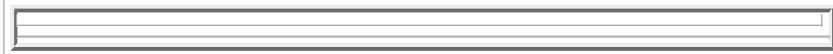


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