MINIMAL N-POINT DIAMETERS AND f-BEST-PACKING CONSTANTS IN \( \mathbb{R}^d \)

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Abstract. In terms of the minimal N-point diameter \( D_d(N) \) for \( \mathbb{R}^d \), we determine, for a class of continuous real-valued functions \( f \) on \([0, +\infty]\), the N-point f-best-packing constant \( \min \{ f(\|x - y\|) : x, y \in \mathbb{R}^d \} \), where the minimum is taken over point sets of cardinality \( N \). We also show that

\[
N^{1/d} \Delta_d^{-1/d} - 2 \leq D_d(N) \leq N^{1/d} \Delta_d^{-1/d}, \quad N \geq 2,
\]

where \( \Delta_d \) is the maximal sphere packing density in \( \mathbb{R}^d \). Further, we provide asymptotic estimates for the f-best-packing constants as \( N \to \infty \).

Let \( f \) be a non-negative function on \([0, \infty)\) and \( \omega_N = \{x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_N\} \) a collection of \( N \) distinct points in Euclidean space \( \mathbb{R}^d \). Set

\[
\delta^\omega_d(f) := \min_{x, y \in \omega_N, x \neq y} f(\|x - y\|),
\]

where \( \|\cdot\| \) denotes the Euclidean norm. In this article we investigate the N-point f-best-packing constant

\[
\delta_d(N; f) := \sup_{\omega_N \subset \mathbb{R}^d, \#\omega_N = N} \delta^\omega_d(f) = \sup_{\omega_N \subset \mathbb{R}^d, \#\omega_N = N} \min_{x, y \in \omega_N} f(\|x - y\|),
\]

where \( \#A \) denotes the cardinality of a set \( A \). A collection of \( N \) points \( \omega_N^* \subset \mathbb{R}^d \) is said to be an N-point f-best-packing configuration if \( \delta^\omega_d(f) = \delta_d(N; f) \).

The classical best-packing problem is the problem of finding a configuration of \( N \) points on a given compact set \( A \) with the largest minimal pairwise distance. Formulated for the Euclidean space \( \mathbb{R}^d \), this becomes the asymptotic problem of finding the largest density of an infinite collection of non-overlapping equal balls in \( \mathbb{R}^d \) (see e.g. [3], [7]). We denote this maximal sphere packing density in \( \mathbb{R}^d \) by \( \Delta_d \); e.g. \( \Delta_1 = 1 \), \( \Delta_2 = \pi/\sqrt{12} \) (cf. [9]) and \( \Delta_3 = \pi/\sqrt{18} \) (cf. [10]).

As a natural extension, the asymptotics of certain weighted best-packing problems on compact sets are investigated in [5]. Here we consider such problems for a certain class \( A \) of functions \( f \) defined on all of \( \mathbb{R}^d \) for fixed \( N \) (see Theorem 1) as

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well as provide asymptotic results (as \( N \to \infty \)) in Corollaries\(^1\) and\(^2\). For example, for Gaussian weighted best-packing on \( \mathbb{R}^2 \), i.e., \( f(t) = t \exp(-t^2) \), our results yield in particular for \( N = 7 \) that \( \delta_2(7; f) = 2^{-1/3}(1/3) \log 2 \) and, furthermore,

\[
\delta_2(N; f) \sim \left( \frac{\Delta_2}{N} \right)^{\frac{N-1}{2}} \left( \frac{N}{\Delta_2} - 1 \right)^{1/2} \left( \frac{1}{2} \log \frac{N}{\Delta_2} \right)^{1/2}, \quad N \to \infty.
\]

An important role in our investigation is played by the quantity

\[
D_d(N) := \min_{x_1, \ldots, x_N \in \mathbb{R}^d} \left\{ \max_{i \neq j} \frac{\|x_i - x_j\|}{\min_k \|x_k - x_i\|} \right\},
\]

which is called the minimal \( N \)-point diameter for \( \mathbb{R}^d \). That the minimum of the ratio in \( (3) \) is attained may be seen using a scaling argument. Clearly, \( D_1(N) = N - 1 \) for each \( N \geq 2 \). For \( d = 2 \), the exact values of \( D_2(N) \) are known (cf. \( 1 \), \( 2 \)) for \( N \) up to 8, and asymptotically there holds

\[
D_2(N) = (N/\Delta_2)^{1/2} + O(1) \quad \text{as} \quad N \to \infty.
\]

Furthermore, it is shown by A. Schürmann in \( 12 \) that for \( N \) sufficiently large, optimal configurations for \( D_2(N) \) are (somewhat surprisingly) always non-lattice packings, as conjectured by P. Erdös.

In comparison with \( 11 \), whose proof relies on results of \( 9 \) that are special for the plane, we show in Theorem\(^2\) that for all \( d \geq 1 \) we have

\[
N^{1/d} \Delta_d^{-1/d} - 2 \leq D_d(N) \leq N^{1/d} \Delta_d^{-1/d} \quad (N \geq 2).
\]

Our first theorem applies to the class \( \mathcal{A} \) of functions \( f \in C([0, \infty)) \) such that \( f(0) = 0, f(t) > 0 \) for \( t > 0 \), \( \lim_{t \to \infty} f(t) = 0 \), and such that there exist positive numbers \( \varepsilon, M (\varepsilon \leq M) \) with the properties that \( f \) is strictly increasing on \( [0, \varepsilon] \) and is strictly decreasing on \( [M, \infty) \). We may assume, without loss of generality, that, for \( f \in \mathcal{A} \), the parameters \( \varepsilon \) and \( M \) in the above definition further satisfy

\[
f(\varepsilon) = f(M) = \min_{t \in [\varepsilon, M]} f(t).
\]

**Lemma 1.** Suppose \( f \in \mathcal{A} \) with parameters \( \varepsilon \) and \( M \) that satisfy \( 5 \). If \( \alpha > M/\varepsilon \), then there is a unique positive solution \( t = \tau(\alpha) \) to the equation

\[
f(t) = f(\alpha t).
\]

Furthermore, \( \tau(\alpha) \in (M/\alpha, \varepsilon) \).

**Proof.** Consider \( g(t) := f(\alpha t) - f(t) \) for \( t \geq 0 \). Since \( M/\alpha < \varepsilon \), \( f(\alpha t) \) is decreasing for \( t \in [M/\alpha, \infty) \). Furthermore, since \( f \) is increasing on \( [0, \varepsilon] \), it easily follows that \( g \) is (strictly) decreasing on \( [M/\alpha, \varepsilon] \) and that

\[
g(M/\alpha) = f(M) - f(M/\alpha) = f(\varepsilon) - f(M/\alpha) > 0.
\]

We also have

\[
g(\varepsilon) = f(\alpha \varepsilon) - f(\varepsilon) < f(M) - f(\varepsilon) = 0
\]

since \( f \) is decreasing on \( [M, \infty) \) and \( \alpha \varepsilon > M \). Hence, \( g \) has exactly one zero in \( (M/\alpha, \varepsilon) \) or, equivalently, \( 4 \) has exactly one solution \( t = \tau(\alpha) \in (M/\alpha, \varepsilon) \).

If \( t \geq M \), then \( f(\alpha t) < f(t) \) since \( f \) is increasing on \( [M, \infty) \). If \( \varepsilon \leq t \leq M \), then \( f(t) \geq f(M) > f(\alpha t) \) since \( \alpha t \geq \alpha \varepsilon > M \). Therefore, there are no values of \( t \geq \varepsilon \) that satisfy \( 4 \). A similar analysis shows that \( 4 \) has no solutions in \( (0, M/\alpha) \) and so \( t = \tau(\alpha) \) is the unique solution of \( 4 \) for \( t > 0 \). \( \square \)
Our first main result is the following:

**Theorem 1.** Let $f \in A$ with parameters $\varepsilon$ and $M$ that satisfy [5]. Let $N_0$ be such that $D_d(N) > M/\varepsilon$ for $N > N_0$ and $t_N = \tau(D_d(N))$ denote the unique value of $t > 0$ such that

$$f(t) = f(D_d(N)t).$$

Then

$$\delta_d(N; f) = f(t_N), \quad N > N_0.$$  

Moreover, a collection of $N(> N_0)$ distinct points $\omega_N = \{x_k\}_{k=1}^{N} \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ is an $N$-point $f$-best-packing configuration if and only if

$$\min_{x,y \in \omega_N \atop x \neq y} \|x - y\| = t_N \text{ and } \text{diam}(\omega_N) = t_N D_d(N).$$

**Proof.** Let $N > N_0$ and let $\omega_N = \{x_k\}_{k=1}^{N}$ be a collection of $N$ points in $\mathbb{R}^d$ such that $\min_{i \neq j} \|x_i - x_j\| = t_N$ and $\text{diam}(\omega_N) = t_N D_d(N)$. Then

$$t_N \leq \|x_i - x_j\| \leq t_N D_d(N) \quad (i \neq j).$$

By Lemma 1 we have $t_N < \varepsilon$ and $t_N D_d(N) > M$. From [5], the definition of $t_N$, and the monotonicity properties of $f$, we have

$$f(t_N) = \min_{t \in \{t_N, t_N D_d(N)\}} f(t),$$

which, together with [10], implies that $f(\|x_i - x_j\|) \geq f(t_N)$ for all $i, j$ ($i \neq j$). Since $\|x_i - x_j\| = t_N$ for some pair $i, j$ ($i \neq j$), we have

$$\delta_d^\omega_N(f) = \min_{i \neq j} f(\|x_i - x_j\|) = f(t_N),$$

and so $\delta_d(N; f) \geq f(t_N)$.

Let $\tilde{\omega}_N = \{y_k \mid k = 1, \ldots, N\}$ denote an arbitrary $N$-point configuration in $\mathbb{R}^d$ and let $\tilde{t} := \min_{i \neq j} \|y_i - y_j\|$. Since $f$ is increasing on $[0, \varepsilon]$ and $t_N \leq \varepsilon$, we have $\delta_d^\tilde{\omega}_N(f) < f(t_N)$ if $\tilde{t} < t_N$; i.e. the configuration $\tilde{\omega}_N$ is not optimal. On the other hand, if $\tilde{t} \geq t_N$, then diam $(\tilde{\omega}_N) \geq D_d(N)\tilde{t} \geq D_d(N)t_N$, and so there must be some $i, j$ such that $\|y_i - y_j\| \geq D_d(N)\tilde{t}$. Hence, $\delta_d^\tilde{\omega}_N(f) \leq f(D_d(N)t_N) = f(t_N)$ with equality if and only if both $\tilde{t} = t_N$ and diam $\tilde{\omega}_N = D_d(N)t_N$. Therefore, $\delta_d(N; f) = f(t_N)$ and a configuration is optimal if and only if the conditions in [9] hold.

For the sake of illustration, consider the function $f_{p,q} \in A$ defined by $f_{p,q}(t) = t^p$ if $0 \leq t \leq 1$ and $f_{p,q}(t) = t^{-q}$ if $t > 1$, where $p, q > 0$ satisfy $1/p + 1/q = 1$. The unique solution of [6] is $\tau(\alpha) = \alpha^{-q/(p+q)}$ for $\alpha > 1$. Then $f_{p,q}(\tau(\alpha)) = 1/\alpha$ and, by Theorem 1

$$\delta_d(N; f_{p,q}) = 1/D_d(N) = \max_{x_1, \ldots, x_N \in \mathbb{R}^d} \left\{ \min_{k \neq \ell} \|x_k - x_\ell\| \bigg/ \max_{i \neq j} \|x_i - x_j\| \right\}.$$ 

On letting $p \to 1$ and $q \to \infty$, $f_{p,q}$ tends to $f_{1,\infty}$ where $f_{1,\infty}(t) = t$ for $0 \leq t \leq 1$ and $f_{1,\infty}(t) = 0$ for $t > 1$, for which the equality in [11] is apparent from the definitions of these quantities.
For the case $d = 1$, we have $D_1(N) = N - 1$, and any configuration of $N$ points that attains $D_1(N)$ in (3) for $N \geq 2$ must be of the form $\{ck + b \mid k = 0, \ldots, N - 1\}$ for any fixed constants $b$ and $c \neq 0$. We thus obtain the following.

**Corollary 1.** Let $f \in \mathcal{A}$ and $d = 1$. Let $\tau_N = \tau(N - 1)$ be the unique solution of equation (3) with $\alpha = N - 1 > M/\varepsilon$. Then $\delta_1(N; f) = f(t_N)$ and any $f$-best-packing configuration is of the form $\{t_Nk + b \mid k = 0, \ldots, N - 1\}$ for some constant $b$.

For example, if $f(t) = t\exp(-t^\beta)$, $\beta > 0$, we can take $\varepsilon = M = \beta^{-1/\beta}$ and we deduce that for $d = 1$ and $N > 2$,

$$t_N = \left[\frac{\log(N - 1)}{(N - 1)^{\beta - 1}}\right]^{1/\beta}$$

and

$$\delta_1(N; f) = \left[\frac{\log(N - 1)}{(N - 1)^{\beta - 1}}\right]^{1/\beta} (N - 1)^{-1/[(N - 1)^{\beta} - 1]}$$

with an optimal configuration $\omega_N = \{t_Nk\}_{k=0}^{N-1}$. (For $N = 2$, we find $\delta_1(2; f) = \beta^{-1/\beta}\exp(-1/\beta)$ with an optimal configuration being $\{0, \beta^{1/\beta}\}$.)

We remark that for the Gaussian weighted problem mentioned earlier, the computation of $\delta_2(7; f)$ follows easily from Theorem 1 and the fact that $D_2(7) = 2$.

Next we present estimates for the minimal $N$-point diameter.

**Theorem 2.** For all $d \geq 1$ and $N \geq 2$,

$$N^{1/d}\Delta_d^{-1/d} - 2 \leq D_d(N) \leq N^{1/d}\Delta_d^{-1/d}.$$  \hspace{1cm} (12)

**Proof.** We say that a set of points in $\mathbb{R}^d$ is 2-separated if the distance between any two points in the set is greater than or equal to 2. For a bounded set $K \subset \mathbb{R}^d$, let $M(K)$ denote the maximum number of points that can be placed in $K$ under the constraint that the distance between any two points is greater than or equal to 2; i.e., $M(K)$ is the maximum cardinality of any 2-separated subset of $K$.

For a compact set $K$ in $\mathbb{R}^d$, we let $\bar{K}$ denote the 2-neighborhood of $K$ defined by

$$\bar{K} := \{y \in K \mid \text{dist}(y, K) \leq 2\},$$

and, for $t \in \mathbb{R}^d$, we let $K + t$ denote the translate of $K$ by $t$.

For $\rho > 1$, let $X_\rho$ denote a 2-separated collection of $M(B(0, \rho))$ points in $B(0, \rho)$, where $B(0, \rho)$ denotes the open ball centered at 0 with radius $\rho$. Then it is known (cf. [3]) that $M(B(0, \rho)) = \rho^d\Delta_d + o(\rho^d)$ as $\rho \to \infty$. Furthermore, for any fixed $\alpha > 0$ we have $M(B(0, \rho) \setminus B(0, \rho - a)) = O(\rho^{d-1})$ as $\rho \to \infty$, which implies

$$\#(X_\rho \cap B(0, \rho - a)) = \rho^d\Delta_d + o(\rho^d)$$

as $\rho \to \infty$, where $\#A$ denotes the cardinality of a set $A$.

Let $K$ be a compact convex set in $\mathbb{R}^d$ that contains the origin 0 and let $Y$ denote a 2-separated collection of $M(K)$ points in $K$. If $t \in \mathbb{R}^d$ is such that $|t| \leq \rho - \text{diam} \bar{K}$, then $\bar{K} + t$ is contained in $B(0, \rho)$ and $X_\rho' = (X_\rho \setminus \bar{K} + t) \cup (Y + t)$ is a 2-separated configuration in $B(0, \rho)$ of $\#X_\rho - \#\left(X_\rho \cap (\bar{K} + t)\right) + M(K)$ points, from which it follows that

$$\#\left(X_\rho \cap (\bar{K} + t)\right) \geq M(K).$$  \hspace{1cm} (14)
Let $\mu_\rho$ denote the discrete measure $\mu_\rho = \sum_{x \in X_\rho} \delta_x$, where $\delta_x$ denotes the unit atomic mass at $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$, and let $\lambda^d$ denote Lebesgue measure on $\mathbb{R}^d$. As before, suppose $K$ is a compact convex set in $\mathbb{R}^d$ that contains 0 and let $\chi_K$ denote the characteristic function of $K$. We next consider the following convolution integral, which, by Tonelli’s theorem, can be written as

$$
\int \int_{B(0, \rho) \times X_\rho} \chi_K(x + t)d\mu_\rho(x)d\lambda^d(t) = \int_{B(0, \rho)} \#(X_\rho \cap (K - t))d\mu_\rho(x)d\lambda^d(t)
$$

(15)

$$
= \int_{X_\rho} \lambda^d(B(0, \rho) \cap (K - x))d\mu_\rho(x).
$$

If $|x| + \text{diam}(K) \leq \rho$, then $K - x \subset B(0, \rho)$, and so we have

$$
\lambda^d(K)\#(X_\rho \cap B(0, \rho - \text{diam}K)) \leq \int_{B(0, \rho)} \#(X_\rho \cap (K - t))d\mu_\rho(x)d\lambda^d(t)
$$

(16)

$$
\leq \lambda^d(K)\#(X_\rho).
$$

For $N \geq 1$, letting $R_N := N^{1/d} \Delta^{-1/d}_d$ and choosing $K = B(0, R_N)$, the first inequality in (16) shows that

$$
\#(X_\rho \cap B(0, \rho - 2R_N))\lambda^d(B(0, R_N)) \leq \lambda^d(B(0, \rho))\max_t \#(B(-t, R_N) \cap X_\rho),
$$

and so, using (16), we obtain as $\rho \to \infty$

$$
\max_t \#(B(-t, R_N) \cap X_\rho) \geq \frac{\#(X_\rho \cap B(0, \rho - 2R_N))\lambda^d(B(0, R_N))}{\lambda^d(B(0, \rho))} = R_N \Delta_d + o(1).
$$

Taking $\rho \to \infty$ it then follows that $M(B(0, R_N)) \geq N$, and thus we have

$$
D_d(N) \leq \frac{\text{diam}(B(0, R_N))}{2} = R_N = N^{1/d} \Delta^{-1/d}_d.
$$

Next we derive the lower estimate for $D_d(N)$. For $N \geq 2$, let $K_N$ denote the convex hull of a 2-separated configuration of $N$ points such that $\text{diam}(K_N) = 2D_d(N)$. Using the second inequality in (16) with $A = \tilde{K}_N$ and the inequality (14), we obtain

$$
\lambda^d(\tilde{K}_N)\#X_\rho \geq \frac{1}{\rho^d} \int_{B(0, \rho - \text{diam}(\tilde{K}_N))} \#(X_\rho \cap (\tilde{K}_N - t))d\lambda^d(t)
$$

(18)

$$
\geq M(\tilde{K}_N)\frac{\lambda^d(B(0, \rho - \text{diam}(\tilde{K}_N)))}{\rho^d}.
$$

Recalling the isodiametric inequality (13; see also [4]) that $\lambda^d(A) \leq \beta_d(\text{diam}(A)/2)^d$ for any bounded measurable set $A \subset \mathbb{R}^d$ and using (13) and taking $\rho \to \infty$, we have

$$
\left(\frac{\text{diam}(\tilde{K}_N)}{2}\right)^d \Delta_d \geq M(\tilde{K}_N) \geq N.
$$

Since $\text{diam}(\tilde{K}_N) = 4 + \text{diam}(K_N) = 4 + 2D_d(N)$, it follows that

$$
D_d(N) \geq \Delta^{-1/d}_d N^{1/d} - 2. \quad \square
$$

We remark that for the case $d = 2$, Bezdek and Fodor [2] have shown that $D_2(N) \geq \Delta^{-1/2}_2 N^{1/2} - 1$, $N \geq 2$. We also note that at the conclusion of their article [1], Bateman and Erdős briefly mention that for $N \to \infty$ “there are asymptotic relations of the form $\frac{1}{2}D_d(N) \sim c_d N^{1/d^*}$ for some unknown constant $c_d$ and refer
to a paper of Rankin [11]. However, to the authors’ knowledge, there appears to be no explicit proof of this fact for arbitrary $d$ in [11] or elsewhere.

Theorem 1 together with equation (9) and Theorem 2 allows us to establish some asymptotic estimates for the $N$-point $f$-best-packing constant $\delta_d(N; f)$ of a fixed function $f \in A$. For example, from (11) and (12) we have for $d \geq 1$,

$$\delta_d(N; f_{p,q}) = \frac{1}{D_d(N)} = \Delta_d^{1/d} N^{-1/d} + O(N^{-2/d}), \quad N \to \infty.$$  

We now investigate how well $\delta_d(N; f)$ can be approximated by $f(\tau(N^{1/d} \Delta_d^{-1/d}))$, as $N \to \infty$, where $\tau(\alpha)$ is the unique solution of (6). For this purpose the following simple lemma is useful.

**Lemma 2.** Let $f$, $M$, and $\varepsilon$ be as in Lemma 1 and let $A$ and $A + \lambda$ both be greater than $M/\varepsilon$. If $\lambda \leq 0$, we further assume that $A \leq (A + \lambda)^2$. Then the following inequalities hold:

(20) \hspace{1cm} f(A\tau(A)/(A + \lambda)) \leq f(\tau(A + \lambda)) \leq f(\tau(A)), \text{ if } \lambda \geq 0,

(21) \hspace{1cm} f((A + \lambda)\tau(A)) \leq f(\tau(A + \lambda)) \leq f(A\tau(A)), \text{ if } \lambda \geq 0,

(22) \hspace{1cm} f(\tau(A)) \leq f(\tau(A + \lambda)) \leq f \left( \frac{A\tau(A)}{A + \lambda} \right), \text{ if } \lambda \leq 0, \quad \frac{A\tau(A)}{A + \lambda} \leq M,

(23) \hspace{1cm} f(A\tau(A)) \leq f(\tau(A + \lambda)) \leq f((A + \lambda)\tau(A)), \text{ if } \lambda \leq 0, \quad \varepsilon \leq (A + \lambda)\tau(A).

**Proof.** The inequalities follow easily from the facts that $\tau(t)$ is decreasing and $t\tau(t)$ is increasing for $t > M/\varepsilon$. \hfill \square

This lemma allows us to obtain asymptotic estimates on $\delta_d(N; f)$, $d \geq 2$, for some subclasses of functions $f \in A$. Set $A := N^{1/d} \Delta_d^{-1/d}$, $\lambda := D_d(N) - A$. Then by applying Theorem 2 and Lemma 2 we immediately obtain the following.

**Corollary 2.** Let $f \in A$. If, for some $\beta \in (0, 1)$, both of the following conditions hold,

(24) \hspace{1cm} \lim_{t \to 0^+} \frac{f(t + g(t))}{f(t)} = 1, \quad \text{for each } g(t) = O(t^{1+1/\beta}), \quad t \to 0^+,

and

(25) \hspace{1cm} \lim_{t \to \infty} \frac{f(t + g(t))}{f(t)} = 1, \quad \text{for each } g(t) = O(t^{-\beta/(1-\beta)}), \quad t \to \infty,

then

(26) \hspace{1cm} \lim_{N \to \infty} \frac{\delta_d(N; f)}{f(\tau(N^{1/d}/\Delta_d))} = 1.

**Proof.** If $\tau(D_d(N)) > N^{-\beta/d}$ for some sequence of integers $N$, then (26) holds by (12), (20), (22), (24), while if $\tau(D_d(N)) \leq N^{-\beta/d}$ for infinitely many $N$, then (26) holds by (12), (21), (23), (25). \hfill \square
For the Gaussian weighted best-packing problem in $\mathbb{R}^2$ mentioned earlier, where $f(t) = t \exp(-t^2)$, the above corollary readily yields the asymptotic result (2).

The following example illustrates the sharpness of Corollary 2. Let $f(x) = \exp\{-1/x^2\}$ for $x \in (0, 1)$, and $f(x) = \exp\{-x^2\}$ for $x \geq 1$. We have

$$\delta_2(N; f) = \exp\{-D_2(N)\} = O(\exp\{-N^{1/2}\}), \quad N \to \infty,$$

$$f(t + g(t)) = O(f(t)), \quad \text{for each } g(t) = O(t^3), \quad t \to 0,$$

and

$$f(t + g(t)) = O(f(t)), \quad \text{for each } g(t) = O(1/t), \quad t \to \infty.$$ 

This example shows that Corollary 2 is optimal in the sense that it is not possible to simultaneously increase the constant $1 + 1/\beta$ and reduce the constant $-\beta/(1 - \beta)$.

**References**


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