

The Pentose Phosphate Pathway

Glucose can enter three pathways; glycolysis, glycogenesis or the pentose phosphate pathway¹. This handout will describe the role of this pathway in generating NADPH, nucleosides and the role of reducing equivalents in metabolism. For more details on this pathway, see Chapter 26 in Biochemistry: A Short Course, available on reserve².

¹ sometimes called the pentose phosphate shunt.

² John L Tymoczko, Jeremy M Berg, and Lubert Stryer. *Biochemistry: A Short Course*. W.H. Freeman and Co, New York, NY, 3rd edition, 2015

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Learning Objectives

- Understand the role of Glucose-6-Phosphate Dehydrogenase in regulating flow through the pentose phosphate pathway.
- Evaluate the role of glucose derived products in fatty acid and triglyceride synthesis.
- Interpret how the combined regulation of glycolysis, glycogenesis and the pentose phosphate pathway can affect the ability to synthesize lipids.
- Explain how defects in the pentose phosphate pathway can lead to disease.

The Pentose Phosphate Pathway

This glucose utilizing pathway runs parallel to glycolysis, taking Glucose-6-Phosphate and converting it into several products, including NADPH, Ribose 5-phosphate³, and several glycolytic intermediates including Fructose-6-phosphate and Glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate. The glycolytic intermediates feed back into glycolysis (see the notes on Glycolysis to see how these pathways reintegrate).

³ which is used to make nucleotides

Glucose-6-Phosphate Dehydrogenase

The first enzyme is the rate limiting and irreversible step of the pentose phosphate pathway is catalyzed by Glucose-6-Phosphate Dehydrogenase (G6PDH). G6PDH is activated by elevations of its two substrates NADP⁺ and Glucose-6-Phosphate. Its activity is inhibited by high levels of NADPH.

The Importance of NADPH

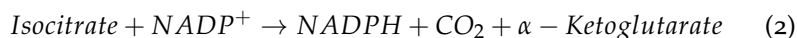
The most important product in terms of nutrition is NADPH⁴. The pentose phosphate pathway is not the only way to generate NADPH, several other mechanisms exist. The first is catalyzed by Malate Dehydrogenase:

⁴ This looks like NADH, but is not, it has an extra phosphate group and is generally not interconvertable with NADH. However, like NADH it generated largely from Niacin, also known as Vitamin B₃.



This pathway removes malate from the TCA cycle to generate NADPH⁵. A third way to generate NADPH is through an isoform of Isocitrate Dehydrogenase:

⁵ Is this cataplerotic, or anaplerotic?



Finally, recently a fourth pathway has emerged, wherein the reduction of 10-TMF to folate⁶ can also generate NADPH in some cells. The details of this, and its potential as chemotherapeutic target due to its importance in rapidly dividing cells is described in Fan et al. [2014]. The relative importance of these three pathways vary based on cell type and metabolic state, but in most cells the pentose phosphate pathway is prominent.

⁶ This is part of one-carbon metabolism, which will not be covered in this course, but will be covered in NUTR631.

The Role of NADPH in Metabolism

While glycolysis is a catabolic pathway, the pentose phosphate pathway could be considered an anabolic pathway. This is because anabolic pathways, notably fatty acid biosynthesis requires a large number of reducing equivalents. These reducing equivalents are generally provided by NADPH. To make one molecule of palmitate (a 16 carbon fatty acid) you need 14 NADPH molecules. Since the pentose phosphate pathway only generates 2 NADPH molecules per glucose, that means that seven glucose molecules need to be oxidized just for the reducing agents for *de novo lipogenesis*⁷.

⁷ We will talk about this more in the lectures on lipid metabolism, later on in the semester.

NADPH is Important for Fighting Oxidative Damage

The other main role of NADPH is to generate reduced glutathione (GSH) from oxidized glutathione (GSSG) by this reaction, catalysed by Glutathione Reductase :



Reduced glutathione is the most important endogenous antioxidant in mammalian cells⁸. When reactive oxygen species, such as free radicals or peroxides are generated, GSH transfers a proton to the oxidative species neutralizing it. Therefore when cells are exposed to oxidative damage, the pentose phosphate pathway is extremely important for mounting the response.

⁸ It also maintains other antioxidants such as Vitamins C and E in their active (reduced) form.

In some cells, such as red blood cells NADPH is the *only* way to reduce glutathione⁹. This makes red blood cells prone to hemolysis¹⁰ and is a common trait in disorders of the pentose phosphate pathway.

⁹ We will talk more about how glutathione is generated in the lecture on non-protein compounds generated from amino acids.

¹⁰ The breakage of red blood cells.

NADPH is Required for Innate Immunity

A third major role of NADPH is the oxidative burst. One way in which immune cells can try to destroy invading cells is to use NADPH to generate reactive oxygen species. Phagocytic cells first engulf the bacteria or fungi, then using the enzyme NADPH Oxidase, use

NADPH to generate a superoxide molecule. This reacts with proteins, membranes and nucleic acids in the bacteria eventually destroying the invading cell. As you might expect this destructive process must be tightly controlled to avoid oxidative damage to normal tissues.

Disorders of the Pentose Phosphate Pathway

MUTATIONS IN G6PDH Mutations in the gene for G6PDH (symbol is *G6PD*) can have varying effects depending on the particular amino acid that is changed¹¹. In the most serious cases, where there is effectively no detectable G6PDH activity. This is the most common enzymatic defect, affecting an estimated 400 million people worldwide. These patients are extremely prone to oxidative damage, and can have a buildup of Glucose-6-Phosphate. They are also very sensitive to certain infections and foods, notably fava beans¹² Interestingly, carriers of the mutant G6PD allele also have partial immunity to malaria.

¹¹ *G6PD* is on the X-chromosome, so primarily this defect affects males.

¹² This disorder was once known as favism, and has been described since antiquity.

THIAMINE IS IMPORTANT FOR TRANSKETOLASE ACTIVITY. Thiamine (Vitamin B₁) becomes an important cofactor for Transketolase¹³. One of the major symptoms of Thiamine deficiency is an inability to generate NADPH.

¹³ The cofactor is TPP or Thiamine Pyrophosphate, which is also important for the activity of Pyruvate Dehydrogenase, α -ketoglutarate dehydrogenase (both discussed in the TCA cycle lecture), branched-chain α -keto acid dehydrogenase (which we will talk about in amino acid catabolism and several other enzymes).

References

Jing Fan, Jiangbin Ye, Jurre J. Kamphorst, Tomer Shlomi, Craig B. Thompson, and Joshua D. Rabinowitz. Quantitative flux analysis reveals folate-dependent NADPH production. *Nature*, 513(7519): 574–574, sep 2014. ISSN 0028-0836. DOI: 10.1038/nature13675. URL <http://www.nature.com/doifinder/10.1038/nature13675>.

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