

Cell Chemistry and Macromolecules

Heather Talbott

Laramie County Community College

How cells survive, communicate, and work together explains how our bodies function.

Chemistry Builds Cells

- Cells are made of molecules
- Molecules are made of atoms
- Atoms interact through attraction and bonding
- These interactions build macromolecules
- Macromolecules allow cells to function

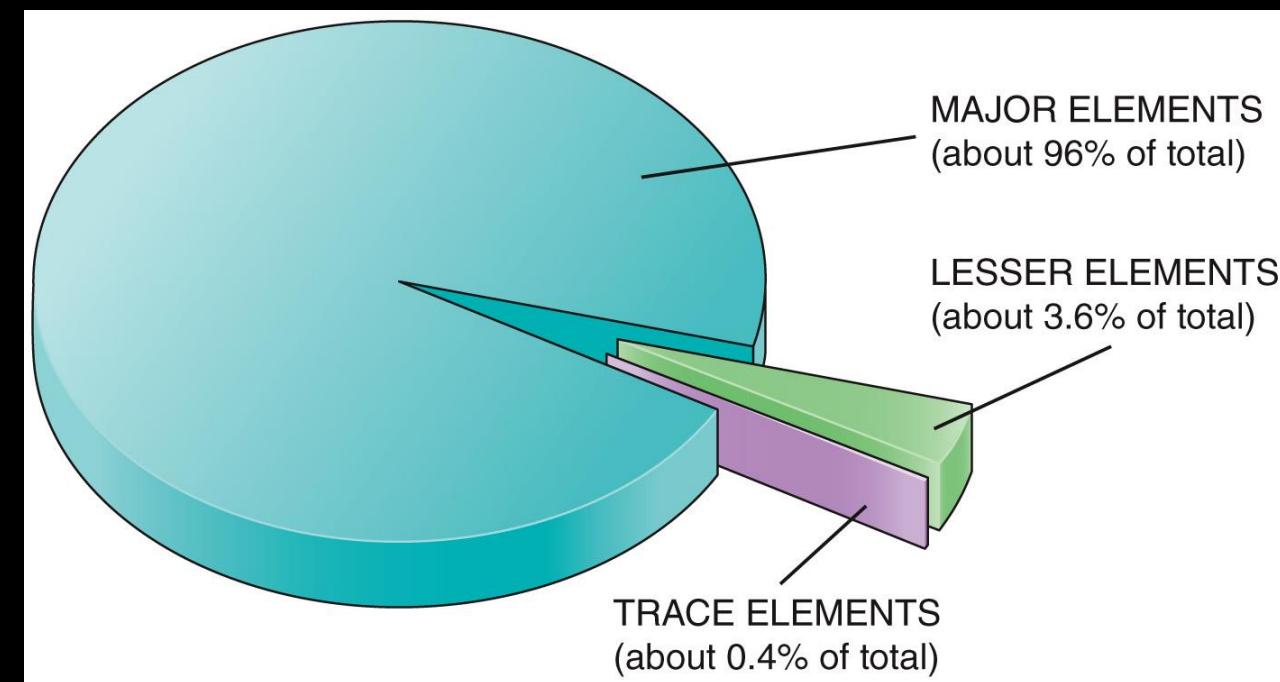
Matter & Elements

- **Chemistry:** the science of structure and interactions of matter = anything that has mass and takes up space
- **Matter:** anything that takes up space and has mass
 - Organisms are composed of matter
- **Element:** a substance that cannot be broken down into other substances by chemical reactions
 - Matter is made up of elements
 - Made up of a single type of atom
 - An element's properties depend on the structure of its atoms



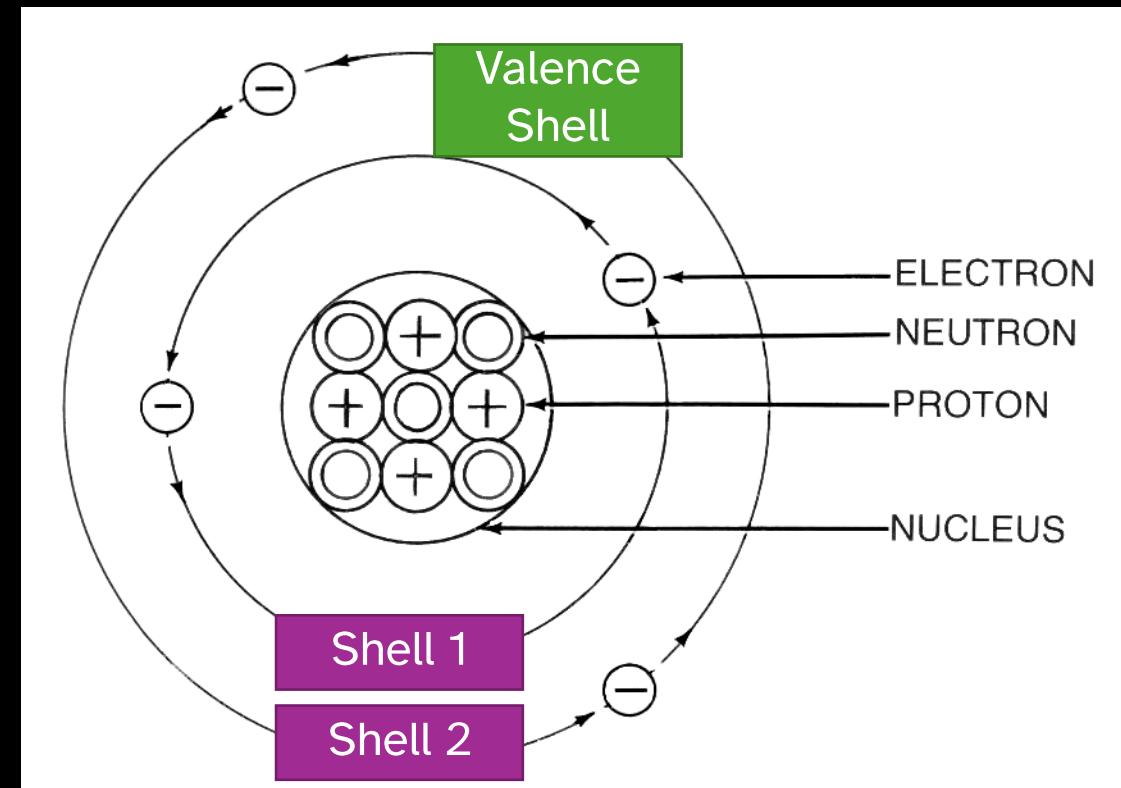
Elements of Humans

- **Major elements:** constitute 96% of the body's mass
 - oxygen (O), carbon (C), hydrogen (H), nitrogen (N)
- **Lesser elements:** constitute about 3.6% of body mass
 - calcium (Ca), phosphorous (P), potassium (K), sulfur (S), sodium (Na), chlorine (Cl), magnesium (Mg), iron (Fe)
- **Trace elements:** present in tiny amounts, but some are very important for bodily function
 - E.g. iodine (I), selenium (Se), copper (Cu)



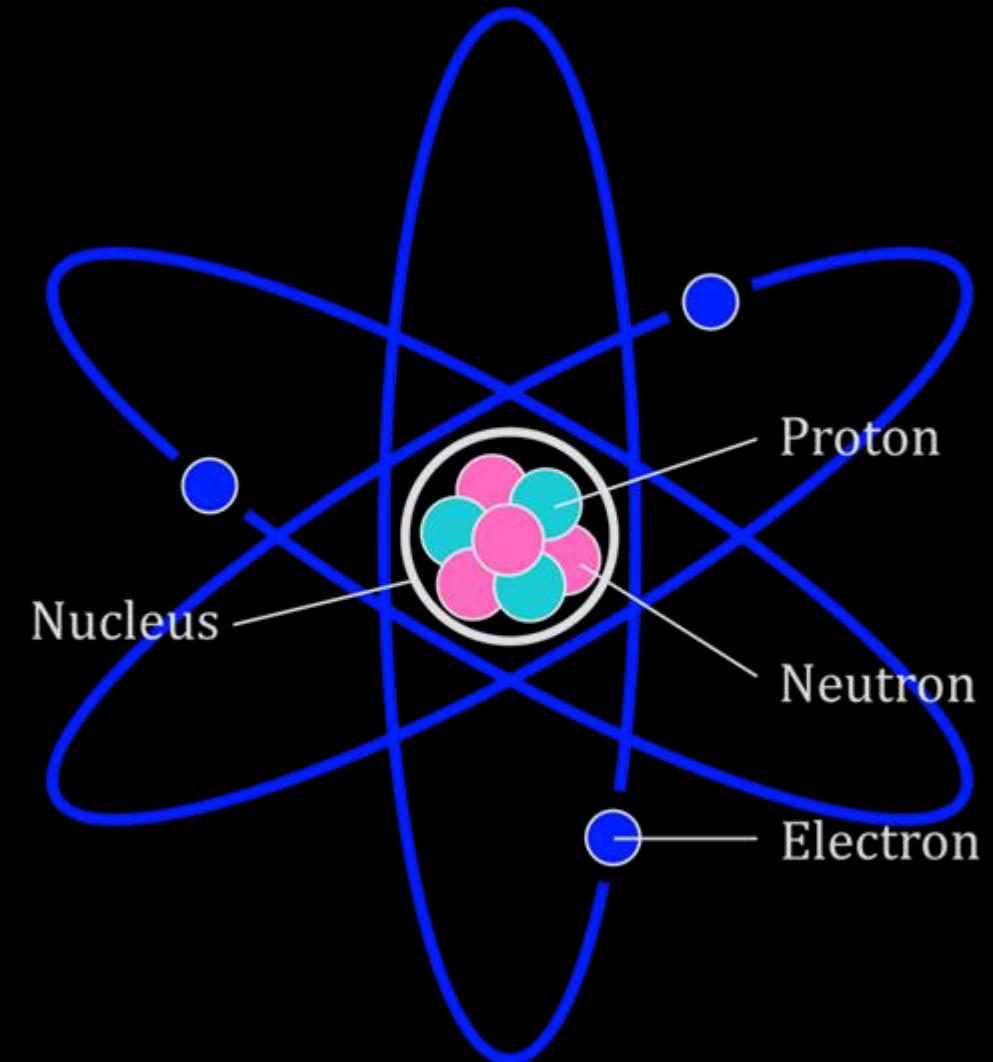
Parts of an Atom

- **Nucleus:** tiny, dense, center of an atom, contains protons (positive) and neutrons (neutral)
- **Electron shell:** a region surrounding atomic nucleus where electrons are found
- **Valence shell:** the outermost electron shell of an atom, containing electrons furthest from nucleus



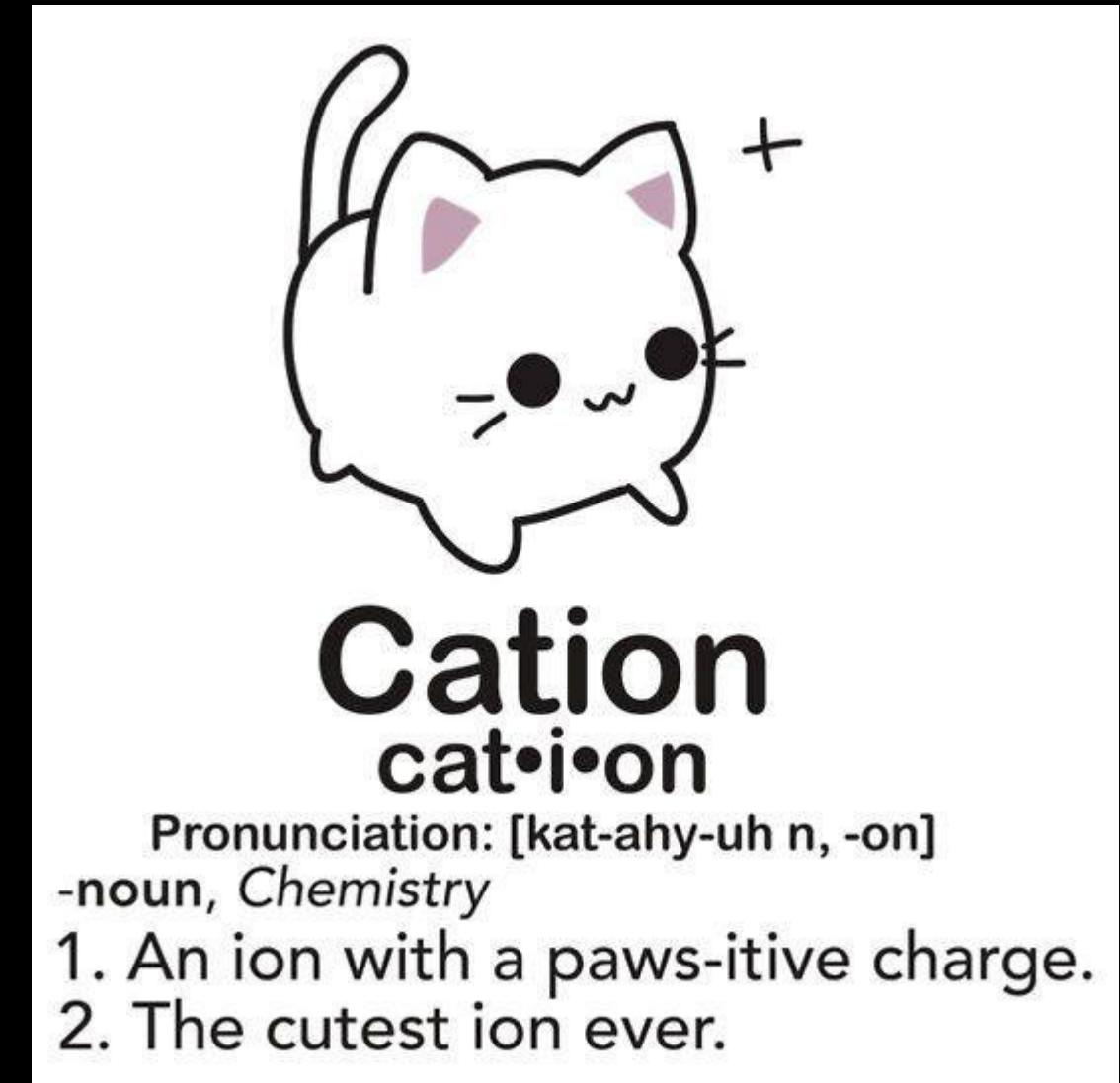
Subatomic Particles

- **Atoms:** the smallest unit of an element that still retains its properties
 - **Protons:** positively charged particles, located in center of atom; defines the element
 - If you change the number of protons, you change the element
 - **Neutrons:** neutrally charged particles, located in center of atom
 - **Electrons:** negatively charged particles, orbit the center of the atom
 - Standard atoms: always have equal numbers of protons, neutrons, and electrons
 - Exception: Hydrogen (H) has 1 P, 0 N, & 1 E



Ions

- Neutral atoms have the same number of protons and electrons
- **Ions:** are charged atoms, formed by changing the number of electrons
 - **Cations:** have fewer electrons than protons and are positively charged
 - **Anions:** more electrons than protons and are negatively charged
 - Ions are fundamental for life for electrical charge, nerve signals, heart function, and many more functions

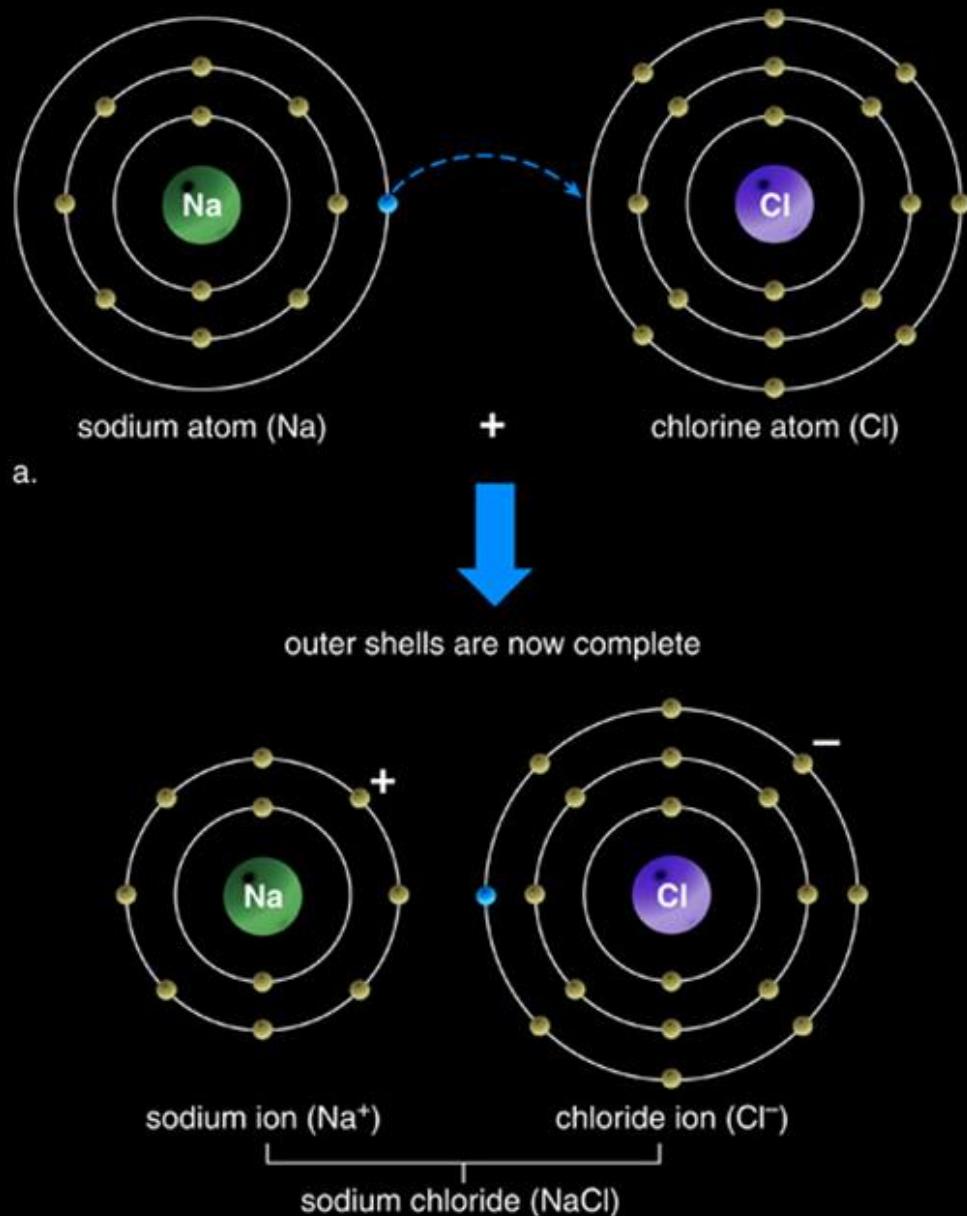


Chemical bonding

- Bonding: elements rearrange electrons between 2+ atoms to “fill” valence shells and provide chemical stability to each atom
- Three types of bonds:
 - Covalent
 - Ionic
 - Hydrogen

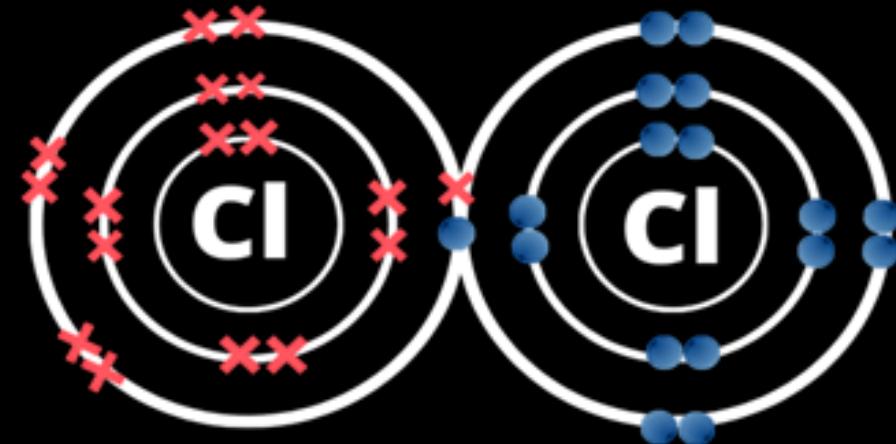
Ionic Bonds

- Ionic bond: an electrical attraction between charged atoms
- Uses a paired redox reactions



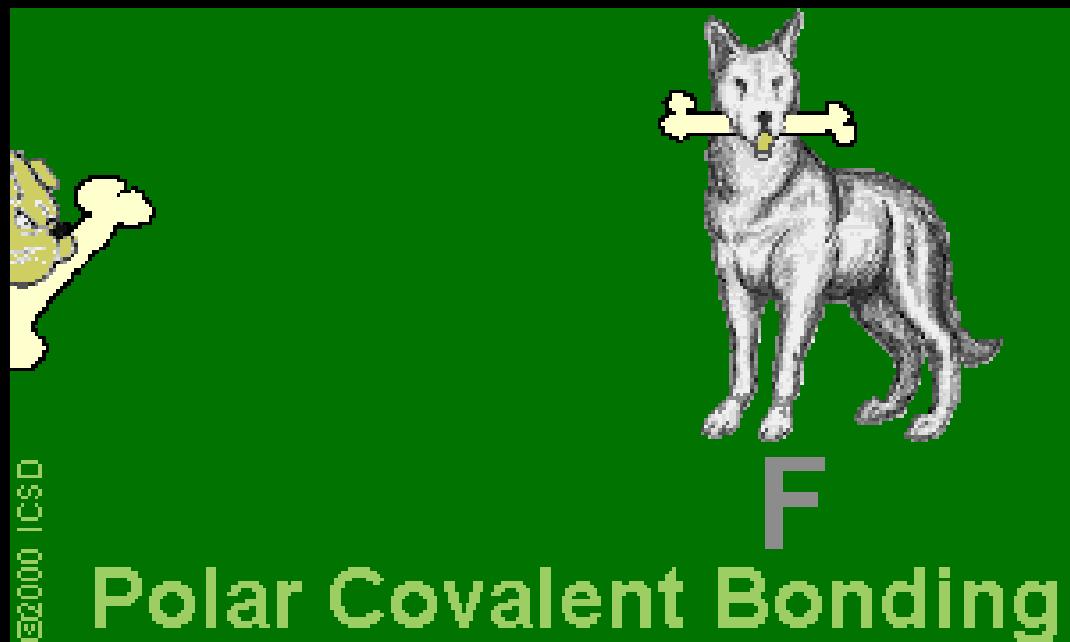
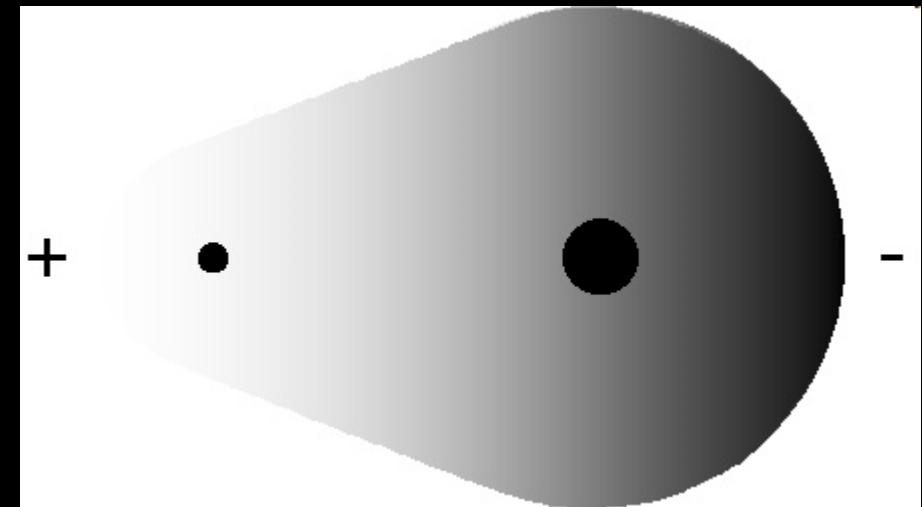
Covalent bond

- Covalent bond: two atoms share one or more pairs of electrons
- This is the strongest chemical bond due to the physical overlap of electrons
- Symbolized with a solid line between atoms



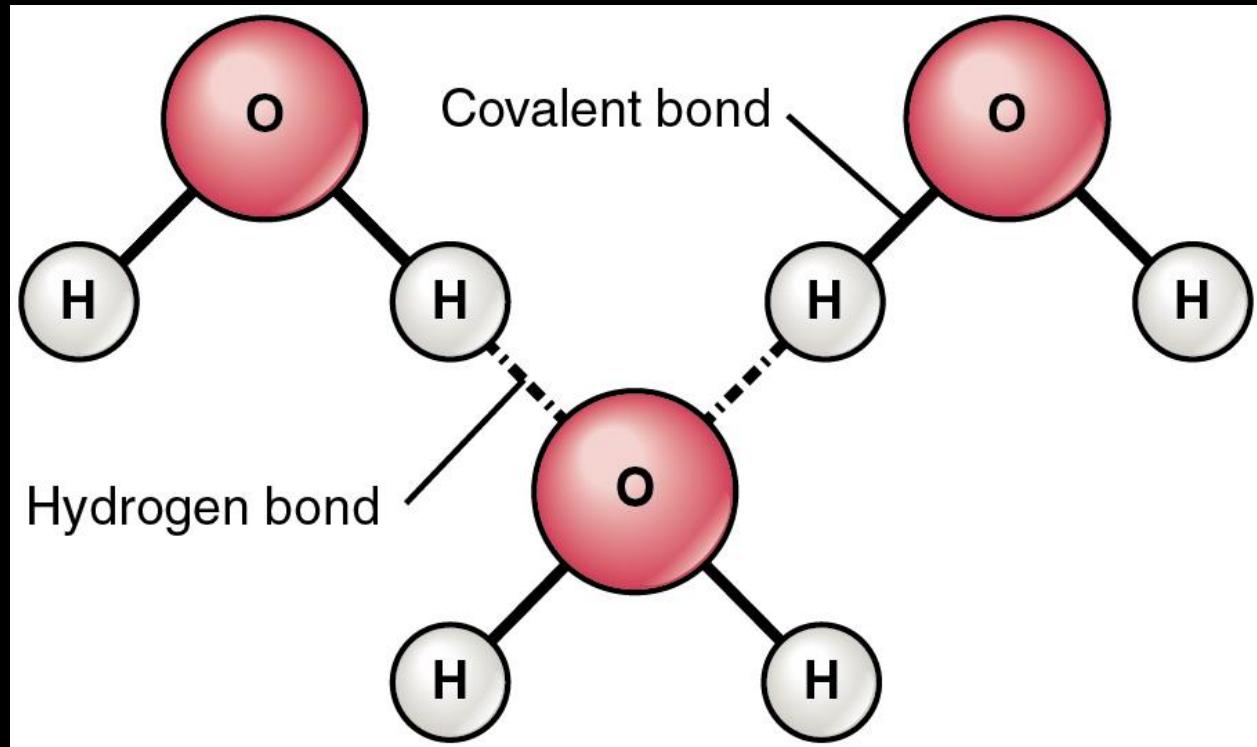
Unfair Covalent Bonds

- **Polar:** some covalent bonds do not share electrons equally between atoms



Hydrogen bonds

- In water, oxygen holds the electrons longer than hydrogen, this makes the oxygen slightly negative and the hydrogen slightly positive
- Because of the slight +/-, nearby water molecules adhere to each other like tiny magnets
- **Hydrogen bonds:** the weak attraction between a slightly positive molecule and a slightly negative part of another molecule
 - Drawn as dotted lines between molecules



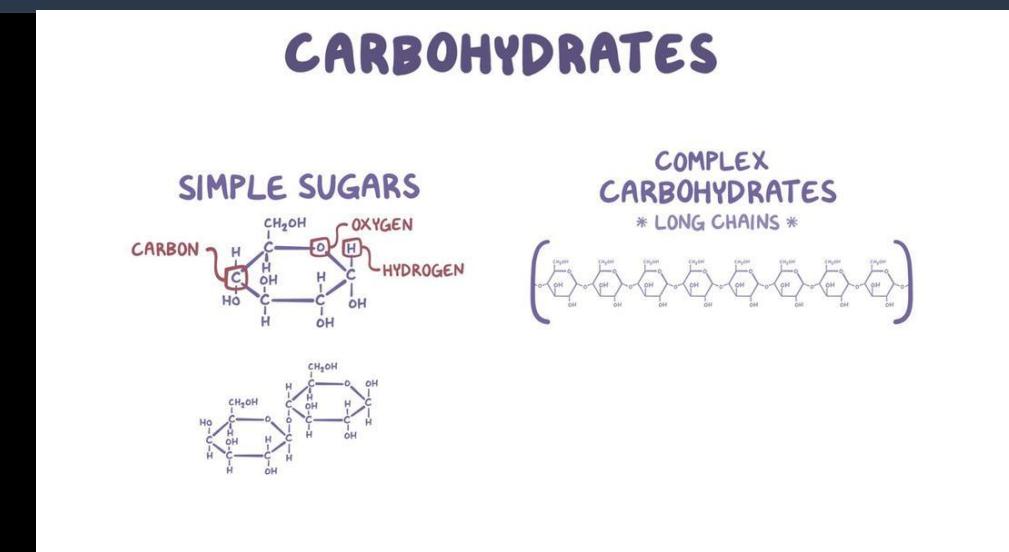
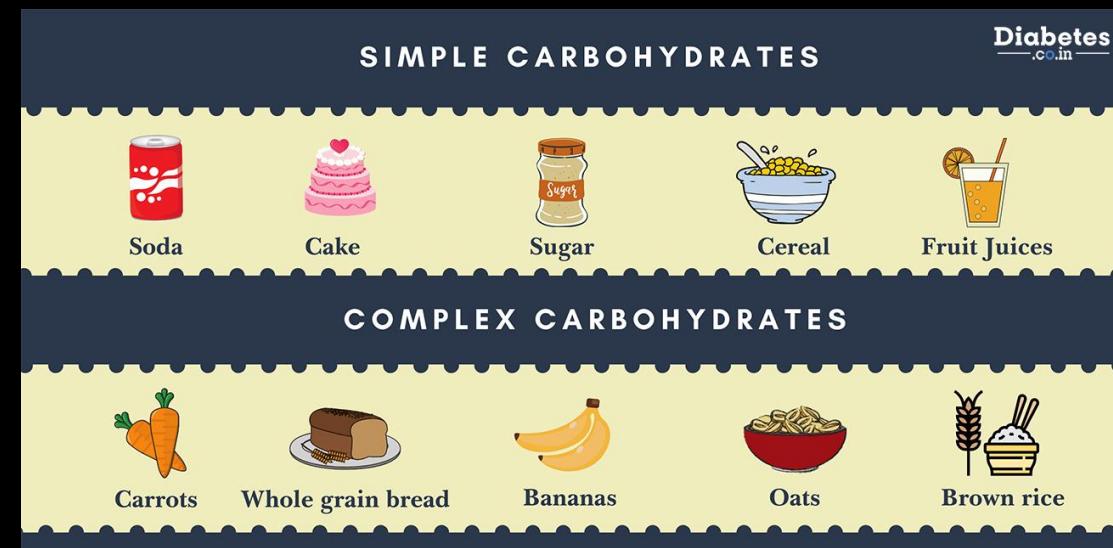
Building and Breaking Molecules

- Cells constantly build and break molecules
- Two main reactions:
- **Dehydration synthesis:** builds large molecules, releases **water**
- **Hydrolysis:** breaks molecules, uses water
- These reactions allow growth and repair

a en
C ex

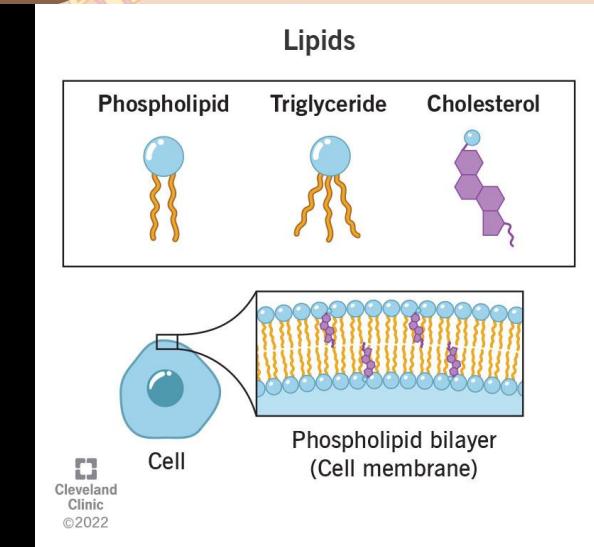
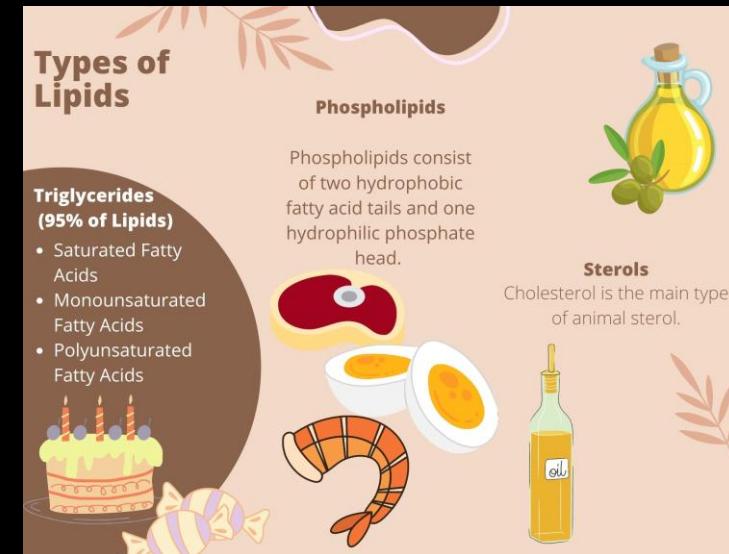
Carbohydrates (Energy Molecules)

- Main source of short-term energy
- Made of sugar units
- Stored as glycogen in humans
- Functions:
 - Provide fuel for ATP production
 - Support brain and muscle activity



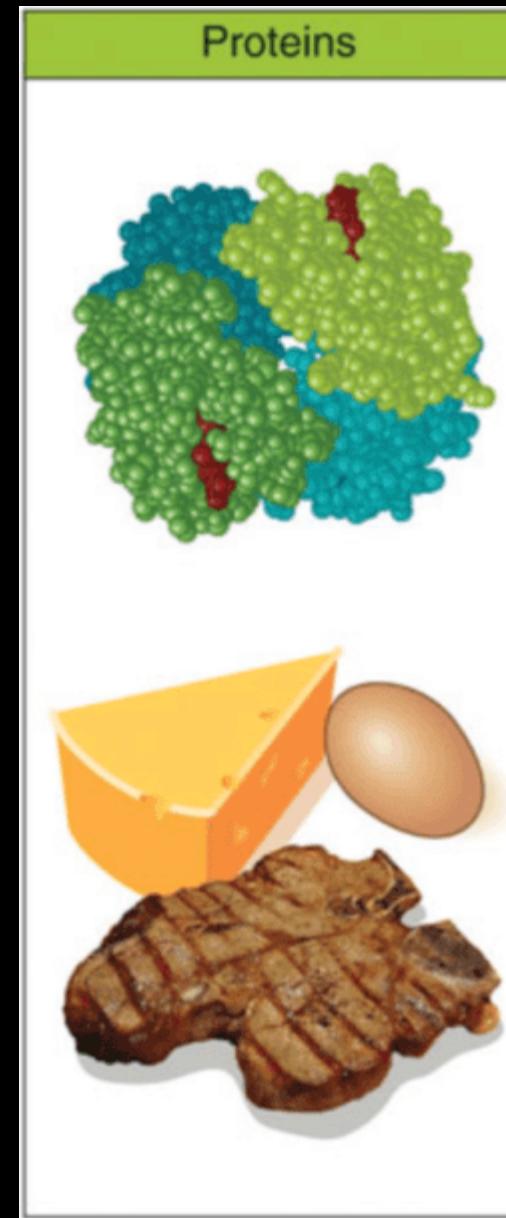
Lipids (Energy Storage & Barriers)

- Lipids are fats and fat-like molecules that do not mix well with water
- Functions:
 - Long-term energy storage
 - Build cell membranes
 - Produce hormones
- Main Types:
 - Triglycerides
 - Phospholipids
 - Steroids



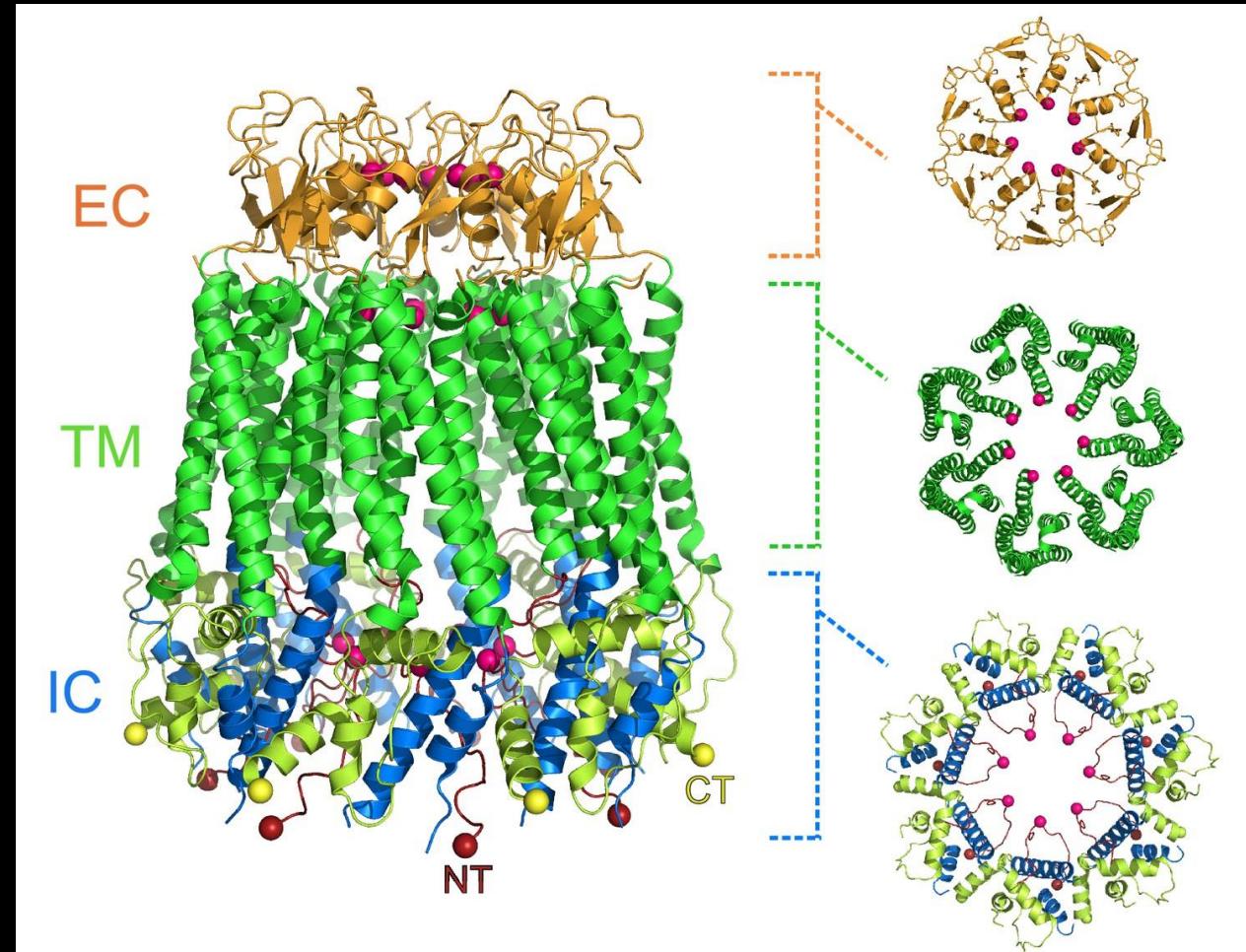
Proteins (The Cell's Workforce)

- Proteins perform most cell functions and are built from amino acids
- Shape determines function
- Functions:
 - Enzymes, Transporters, Receptors, Muscle fibers, Antibodies



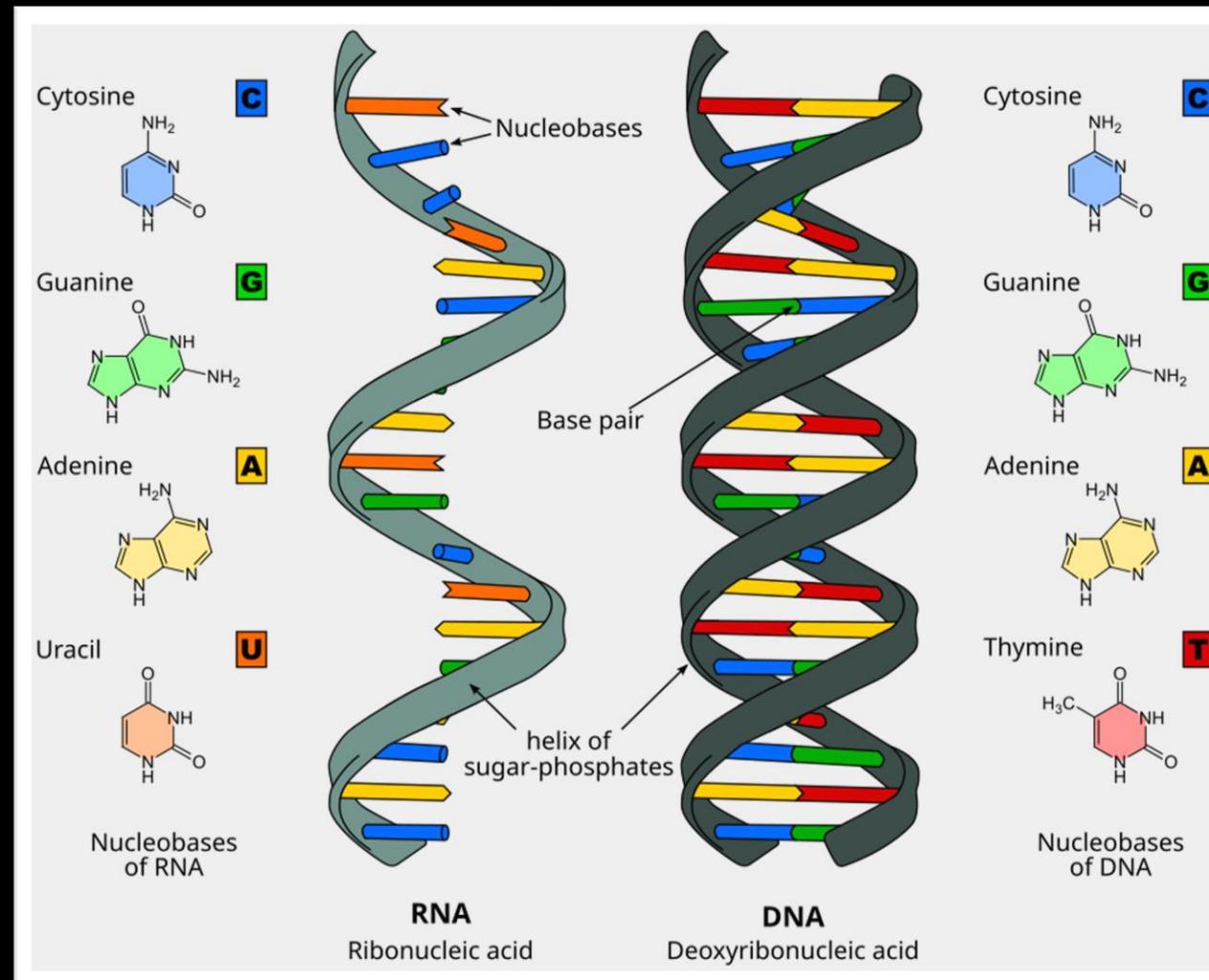
Protein Shape and Function

- Proteins fold into specific shapes
- Shape depends on chemical interactions
- Shape determines what the protein can do
- Damage to shape = loss of function
- Some things that can damage protein shapes:
 - Fever
 - Toxins
 - pH changes



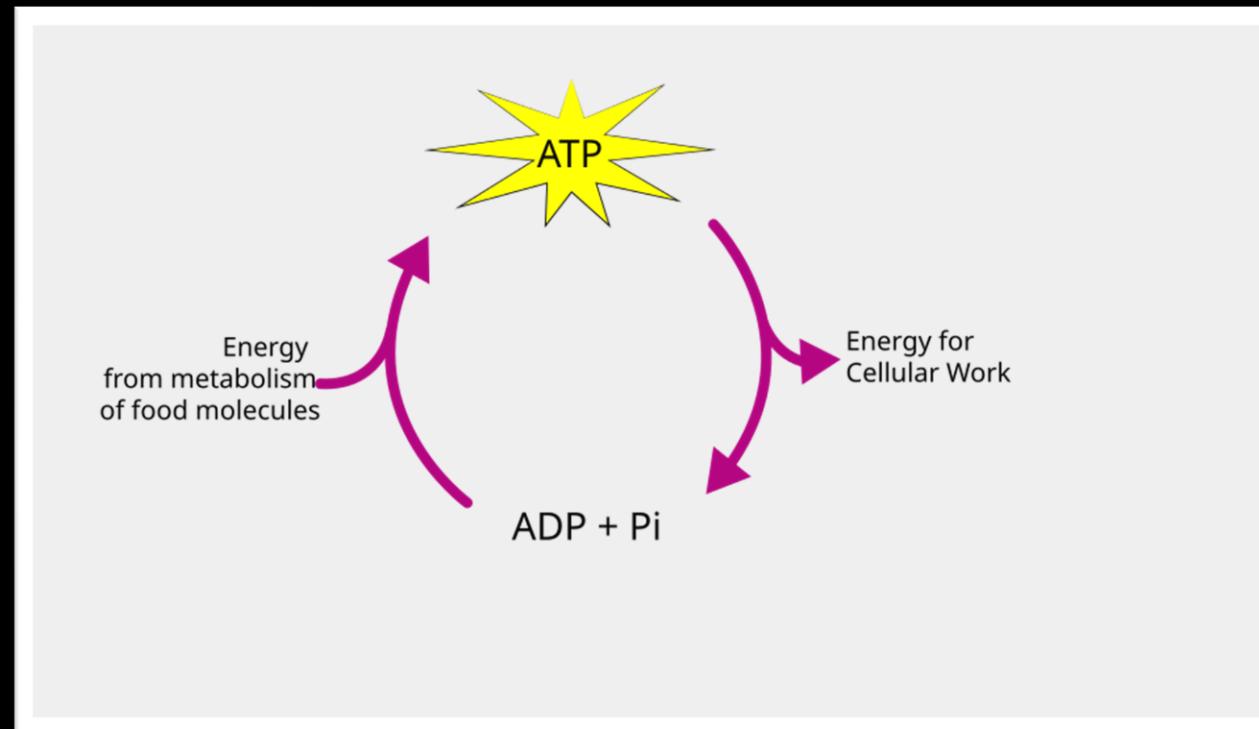
Nucleic Acids (Cell Instructions)

- Nucleic acids store genetic information
- Two main types:
 - DNA – instructions
 - RNA – messengers
- Functions:
 - Control protein production
 - Guide cell activity



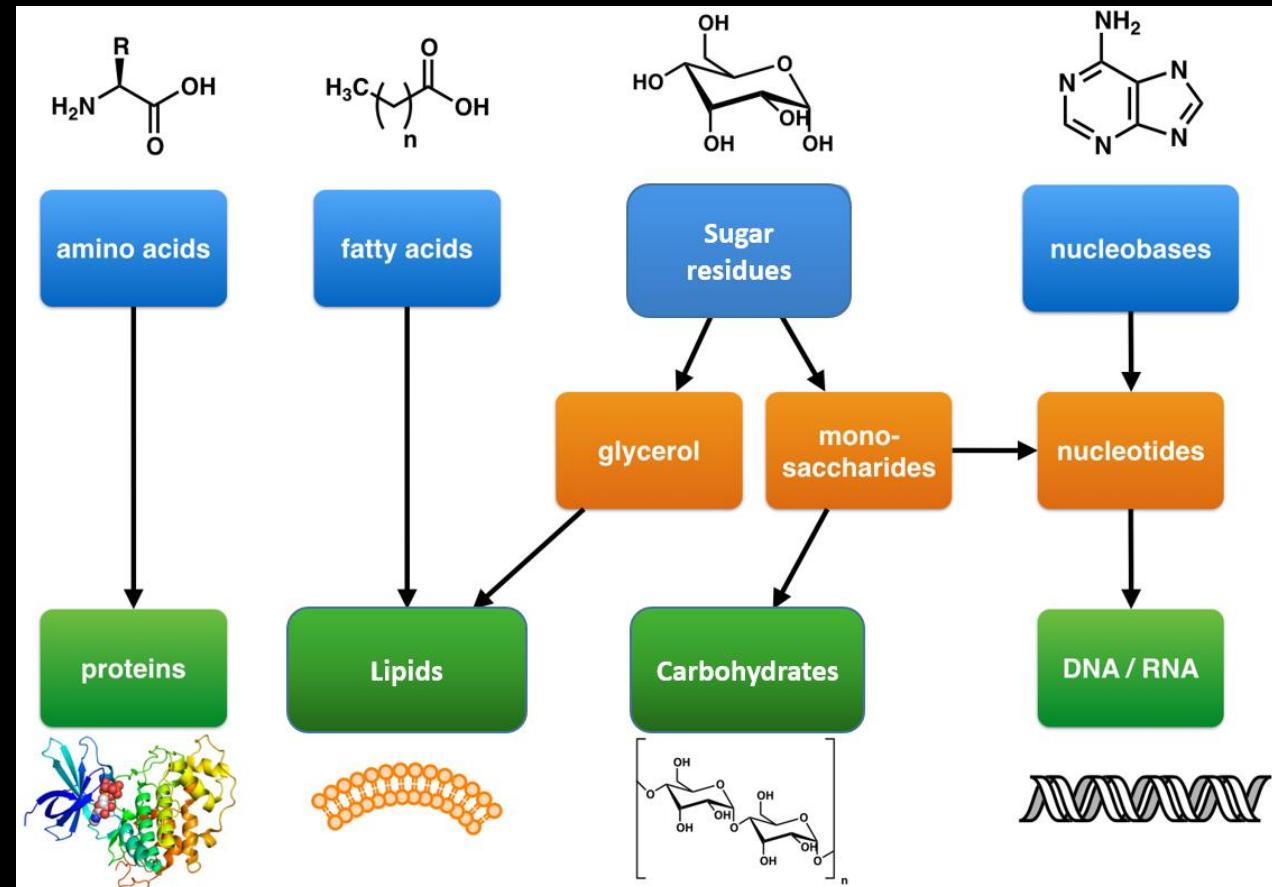
ATP (Link Between Chemistry and Work)

- ATP is a special nucleotide
- Stores usable energy
- Powers cellular processes
- Functions:
 - Muscle contraction
 - Transport
 - Synthesis
 - Signaling



Macromolecules Work Together

- Carbohydrates supply energy
- Lipids store energy and form membranes
- Proteins do the work
- DNA gives instructions
- ATP powers activity



Physiology → Cells → Chemistry

- Cells depend on chemistry
- Water enables reactions
- Macromolecules perform functions
- ATP provides energy
- Balance keeps cells alive



Resources

- Dingess, Paige (2025)
- Grammarly. (2026). Grammarly (Version 14.1268.0) [Software].
<https://www.grammarly.com/>
- OpenAI. (2026). ChatGPT (GPT-5) [Large language model].
<https://chat.openai.com/>

Creation and Copyright Information

- Last updated: Jan 29, 2026
- Last updated by: Heather Talbott
- This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International