

Proline

Table of Contents

summary

Chemical Properties

- Physical Properties

- Structural Characteristics

- Biological Roles and Reactions

Biological Role

- Functions in Stress Response

- Role in Protein Structure

- Involvement in Cell Signaling

- Contributions to Metabolic Pathways

Dietary Sources

- Animal-Based Sources

- Plant-Based Sources

Applications

- Food Industry

- Biochemical and Pharmaceutical Research

Research

- Role of Proline in Metabolic Adaptation

- Nutritional Impact and Food Sources

- Implications for Health and Disease

- Challenges in Food Security and Nutrition

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summary

Proline is a non-essential amino acid with the molecular formula $C_5H_9NO_2$, notable for its unique cyclic structure that influences protein folding and stability. Classified

as pyrrolidine-2-carboxylic acid, proline is characterized by the absence of an alpha hydrogen atom, which limits its capacity to stabilize secondary protein structures such as alpha helices and beta sheets. This distinctive property allows proline to play crucial roles in structural frameworks of proteins, particularly in collagen, making it essential for maintaining the integrity and functionality of various biological tissues.[\[1\]\[2\]](#).

The biological significance of proline extends to its functions in stress responses and metabolic pathways. In plants, proline acts as an osmoprotectant, helping cells maintain osmotic balance during adverse conditions such as drought and salinity. Its accumulation is linked to protective mechanisms against oxidative stress and damage from extreme temperatures.[\[3\]\[4\]](#). In mammals, proline contributes to cell signaling and metabolism, influencing processes like autophagy and energy production, especially under metabolic stress.[\[5\]\[6\]](#). Additionally, deficiencies in proline metabolism are associated with certain health disorders, emphasizing its importance in both health and disease contexts.[\[7\]\[6\]](#).

Proline is also recognized for its dietary sources and applications in various industries. It is abundant in animal products such as meat, fish, and dairy, as well as in specific plant foods like legumes and grains.[\[8\]\[9\]](#). Its roles as a flavor enhancer and food additive have garnered attention in the food industry, where it is used to improve taste and preserve products.[\[10\]\[11\]](#). Furthermore, proline's involvement in collagen synthesis underscores its relevance in health research, particularly regarding conditions affecting connective tissues.[\[6\]\[12\]](#).

Controversially, while proline's benefits are well-documented, challenges related to food security and nutrition highlight the need for increased awareness of proline-rich diets to combat malnutrition and associated health risks worldwide.[\[13\]\[14\]](#). Understanding the implications of proline in both dietary and therapeutic contexts is crucial for addressing contemporary nutritional challenges and promoting overall health.

Chemical Properties

Proline, with the molecular formula $C_5H_9NO_2$ and a molecular weight of 115.13 g/mol, is an amino acid characterized by its unique rigid structure, which influences protein folding and stability.[\[1\]\[2\]](#). The IUPAC name for proline is pyrrolidine-2-carboxylic acid, reflecting its cyclic structure that incorporates a nitrogen atom within a five-membered ring.[\[2\]](#).

Physical Properties

Proline appears as a white powder and is odorless with a melting point of 220-222 °C (decomp) and a density ranging from 1.35 to 1.38 g/cm³.[\[3\]](#). The compound is highly soluble in water, which facilitates its biological roles, especially in metabolic processes. With a refractive index of 1.487, proline's physical properties further contribute to its functionality in various biochemical applications.[\[3\]](#).

Structural Characteristics

Proline is distinguished by the absence of an alpha hydrogen atom, which inhibits its ability to form hydrogen bonds typical of other amino acids. This property prevents proline from stabilizing secondary structures such as alpha helices and beta sheets in proteins; instead, it tends to disrupt these configurations and promotes the formation of beta turns.[\[5\]\[2\]](#). As a result, proline is frequently found at the edges of beta sheets or as the first residue in alpha helices, where its unique structure can be accommodated.[\[2\]](#).

Biological Roles and Reactions

In biological systems, proline serves as a crucial component in the synthesis of proteins and peptides. It acts as a chiral catalyst in asymmetric synthesis and plays a significant role in pharmaceutical formulations, enhancing the stability of various compounds.[\[3\]\[4\]](#). Proline accumulation is also vital for osmotic adjustment in plants under stress conditions, such as drought or salinity, highlighting its importance in plant physiology.[\[15\]](#). Additionally, proline's involvement in metabolic pathways has implications for understanding disorders associated with proline metabolism, such as certain hereditary spastic paraplegias and other metabolic diseases.[\[7\]\[6\]](#).

Biological Role

Proline is a significant amino acid that plays diverse roles in biological systems, particularly in plants and mammals. It is involved in various physiological processes that are crucial for maintaining cellular integrity and responding to environmental stressors.

Functions in Stress Response

Proline acts as an osmoprotectant in plants, accumulating during abiotic stress such as drought and salinity, which helps in osmotic balance and cellular protection from damage caused by reactive oxygen species (ROS) [\[16\]\[6\]](#). Its accumulation serves as an evolutionary conserved mechanism that aids in cell defense by quenching hydroxyl radicals and preventing oxidative damage [\[6\]](#). Additionally, proline protects cells from the formation of ice crystals during freezing, thus preserving cellular function in cold environments [\[6\]](#).

Role in Protein Structure

In mammals, proline is crucial in the structural framework of proteins. It is a key component of collagen and various other proteins, where it contributes to the stability and conformation of protein structures. Proline-rich regions in proteins can influence their folding and interactions, impacting their biological activity [\[16\]\[6\]](#). Its unique cyclic structure allows it to introduce kinks in protein chains, facilitating specific three-dimensional configurations necessary for protein function.

Involvement in Cell Signaling

Proline also plays a role in modulating cell signaling pathways. It can influence autophagy, cell proliferation, and differentiation by interacting with various signaling molecules [6]. For instance, its incorporation into peptides can affect the regulation of pathways involved in stress responses and growth, underscoring its multifaceted contributions to cellular homeostasis and development.

Contributions to Metabolic Pathways

Moreover, proline is involved in metabolic pathways related to energy production. It can be utilized as a source of energy in conditions where glucose is limited, thereby supporting cell survival under metabolic stress [16]. The biosynthesis and catabolism of proline are regulated by specific enzymes, including proline dehydrogenase and pyrroline-5-carboxylate reductase, which manage its levels within cells [17][6]. This regulation is critical for maintaining proline homeostasis and ensuring that its functions in stress responses and metabolic adaptation are effectively executed.

Dietary Sources

Proline is an amino acid that plays a significant role in the synthesis of collagen and is essential for various metabolic processes in the body. Its dietary sources can be categorized into animal-based and plant-based foods.

Animal-Based Sources

Animal-derived foods are among the richest sources of proline. Key sources include meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products. Specifically, proline is abundant in collagen-rich foods such as bone broth, chicken skin, and pork rinds, which are significant contributors to proline intake in diets. For example, proline constitutes about 10% of the total amino acids found in collagen, making it a crucial component of foods rich in this protein [8][18]. Other animal sources that provide proline include various meats (beef, chicken, pork) and fish such as cod and monkfish [19][9].

Plant-Based Sources

Although animal sources are more concentrated, proline can also be obtained from certain plant-based foods. Some notable plant sources include soy products, legumes, nuts, and grains. Specific vegetables such as cabbage and asparagus, along with wheat and its derivatives, also contribute to proline intake [20][9]. While the levels of proline in plant foods are generally lower than in animal sources, they can still be a valuable part of a balanced diet for those following vegetarian or vegan lifestyles.

Applications

Proline, particularly L-proline, has diverse applications across various fields, including food technology, health, and biochemistry.

Food Industry

L-proline is increasingly recognized as a flavor enhancer and food additive. It is utilized in products such as soups, sauces, and snacks to enhance taste and improve palatability[3]. Studies have demonstrated that adding 1-10% L-proline to artificial sweeteners, such as sodium saccharin and aspartame, significantly amplifies sweetness, mellows the taste, and provides a longer-lasting aftertaste, similar to that of natural sweeteners[10][11]. Furthermore, the inclusion of L-proline can enhance the sourness of organic acids (e.g., acetic acid, citric acid) when added in the range of 1-5%, making the flavor profile more appealing and akin to natural flavors[11].

L-proline also has specific applications in food preservation and processing. For example, incorporating 5-10% L-proline into pickled products has been shown to enhance flavor rapidly and shorten pickling time[11]. Additionally, it contributes to the improvement of alcoholic beverages, aiding in flavor enhancement and complexity[11].

Biochemical and Pharmaceutical Research

In the realm of biochemistry, L-proline plays a crucial role in collagen synthesis, a protein that constitutes approximately 30% of total human proteins[6]. The availability of L-proline is essential for maintaining the structural integrity of connective tissues such as bone, cartilage, and tendons. Consequently, it has implications for health, particularly in the context of conditions like osteoporosis, where dietary L-proline is important for bone density preservation in animal models[6].

Furthermore, research has shown that L-proline can influence stem cell plasticity. For instance, it has been observed that L-proline-induced epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (esMT) is modulated by various chemical agents, indicating its potential utility in regenerative medicine and cancer research[6].

Research

Role of Proline in Metabolic Adaptation

Research has demonstrated that proline plays a significant role in metabolic adaptation, particularly in response to varying protein intake levels. Studies have highlighted how proline's unique cyclic structure facilitates the folding of proteins and can impact peptide bond formation, thereby influencing overall protein synthesis and metabolism[21][22]. These characteristics make proline an essential component in various biochemical pathways, especially in collagen synthesis and tissue repair, which are critical for maintaining structural integrity in the body[21][12].

Nutritional Impact and Food Sources

The dietary significance of proline is underscored by its presence in numerous food sources, particularly animal products such as meat, fish, and dairy, as well

as in specific plant foods like cabbage, soy, and wheat[23][9]. Investigations into the association between proline intake and health outcomes have been conducted, emphasizing the need to understand how different dietary sources contribute to overall proline consumption[24]. Moreover, the cofactor role of vitamin C in proline metabolism, specifically in converting proline to hydroxyproline, has been noted, indicating that a balanced intake of these nutrients is essential for optimal health[14].

Implications for Health and Disease

Proline's impact on health extends beyond its structural roles; it has been associated with various physiological benefits, including enhancing immune function, supporting skin health, and potentially aiding in the management of collagen deficiencies[12][16]. Research has suggested that adequate proline levels may improve antioxidant status and assist in tissue repair mechanisms, which are critical for recovery from injuries and in the aging process[12][17]. These findings indicate the importance of proline in not just diet but also in therapeutic contexts, such as developing functional foods or supplements aimed at improving collagen synthesis and overall health outcomes.

Challenges in Food Security and Nutrition

The global challenges associated with food security and nutrition highlight the importance of proline-rich diets. Malnutrition remains a pressing issue worldwide, and poor dietary habits contribute significantly to health risks, including metabolic diseases[13]. Understanding the nutritional composition of foods, including proline content, is vital for addressing these challenges and developing effective dietary guidelines that promote health and wellbeing[13][14]. Enhanced awareness and incorporation of proline-rich foods may contribute positively to mitigating nutritional deficiencies and improving population health outcomes.

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