

THE MANGA GUIDE™ TO

COMICS
INSIDE!

BIOCHEMISTRY

MASAHARU TAKEMURA
KIKUYARO
OFFICE SAWA



1

WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE YOUR BODY?

.....



1. Cell Structure

*PROJECTION ROOM

スクリーン室*

COME ON IN AND HAVE A SEAT. THIS IS THE PROJECTION ROOM.

WOW!



THE IMAGES FROM ROBOCAT, WHOM YOU INGESTED EARLIER, WILL BE PROJECTED HERE.

THAT'S RIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO STUDY YOUR BODY'S CHEMICAL REACTIONS!



COOL! SO I'LL ACTUALLY GET TO SEE WHAT'S INSIDE MY OWN BODY?

THERE'S NO POINT IN BEING BEAUTIFUL ON THE OUTSIDE IF YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE INSIDE.

INTELLIGENCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PHYSICAL APPEARANCE!

MIND BOGGLED



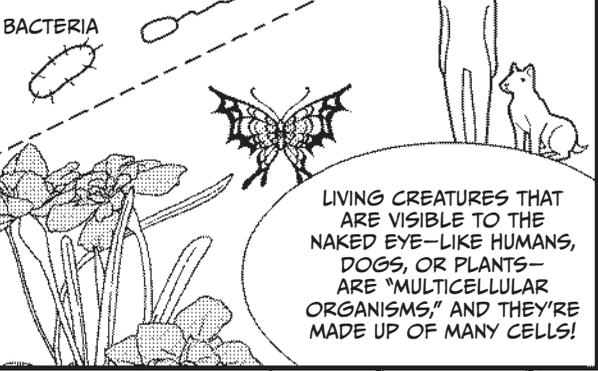
YOU LEARNED ABOUT CELLS IN BIOLOGY CLASS, RIGHT?

YEP!



CELLS ARE LIKE TINY POUCHES THAT MAKE UP OUR BODIES!

AMOEBAE, BACTERIA, AND OTHER TINY ORGANISMS ARE "UNICELLULAR MICROORGANISMS," WHICH MEANS THEY'RE MADE UP OF A SINGLE CELL.

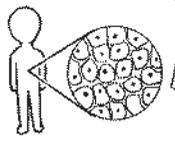


LIVING CREATURES THAT ARE VISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE—LIKE HUMANS, DOGS, OR PLANTS—ARE "MULTICELLULAR ORGANISMS," AND THEY'RE MADE UP OF MANY CELLS!



THAT'S RIGHT!

FOR EXAMPLE, A SINGLE ADULT BODY CONSISTS OF AN UNBELIEVABLY LARGE NUMBER OF CELLS... BETWEEN 60 AND 100 TRILLION.



I BET EVEN THE PROFESSOR'S CELLS ARE BEAUTIFUL!



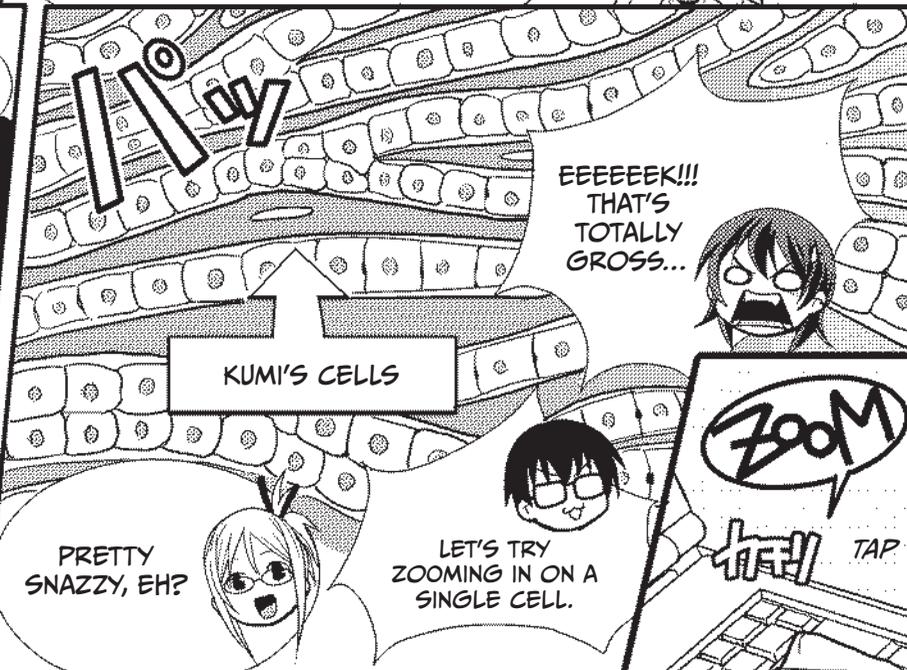
TEE HEE

THE CELL IS THE SMALLEST UNIT INSIDE OUR BODIES THAT CAN BE CLASSIFIED AS "LIVING."



HEY, THE IMAGE FINISHED DOWNLOADING!

TAP TAP TAP



KUMI'S CELLS

EEEEEEK!!! THAT'S TOTALLY GROSS...



PRETTY SNAZZY, EH?



LET'S TRY ZOOMING IN ON A SINGLE CELL.



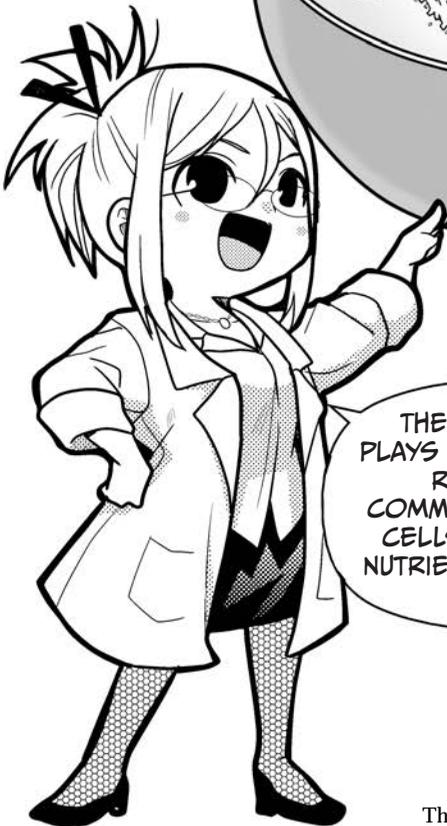
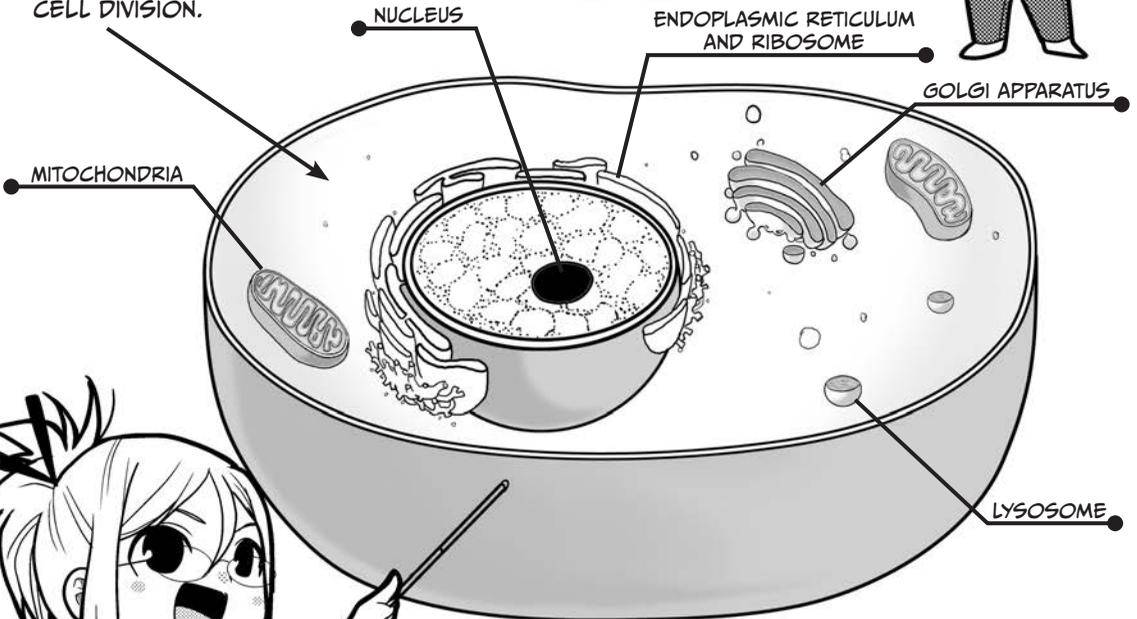
ZOOM TAP

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF A CELL?

THE CYTOSOL CONTAINS MANY PROTEINS, SACCHARIDES, AND OTHER CELLULAR COMPONENTS. IT'S THE LOCATION OF MANY CELLULAR PROCESSES LIKE SIGNALING, PROTEIN TRAFFICKING, AND CELL DIVISION.

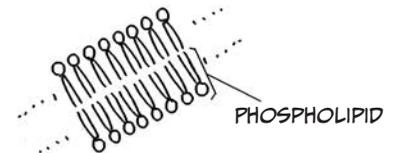
CELLS ARE FILLED WITH A THICK LIQUID CALLED *CYTOSOL*. SUBUNITS CALLED *ORGANELLES* FLOAT IN THE CYTOSOL.

THE LARGEST ORGANELLE, LOCATED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CELL, IS THE *NUCLEUS*.



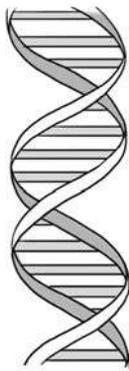
CYTOPLASM IS A GENERAL TERM USED TO REFER TO ALL THE LIQUID INSIDE THE *CELL MEMBRANE*, INCLUDING WITHIN ORGANELLES. THE *CELL MEMBRANE* IS A TYPE OF *LIPID BILAYER*.

THE *CELL MEMBRANE* PLAYS SEVERAL IMPORTANT ROLES, SUCH AS *COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CELLS*, *ABSORPTION OF NUTRIENTS*, AND *EXPULSION OF WASTE*.



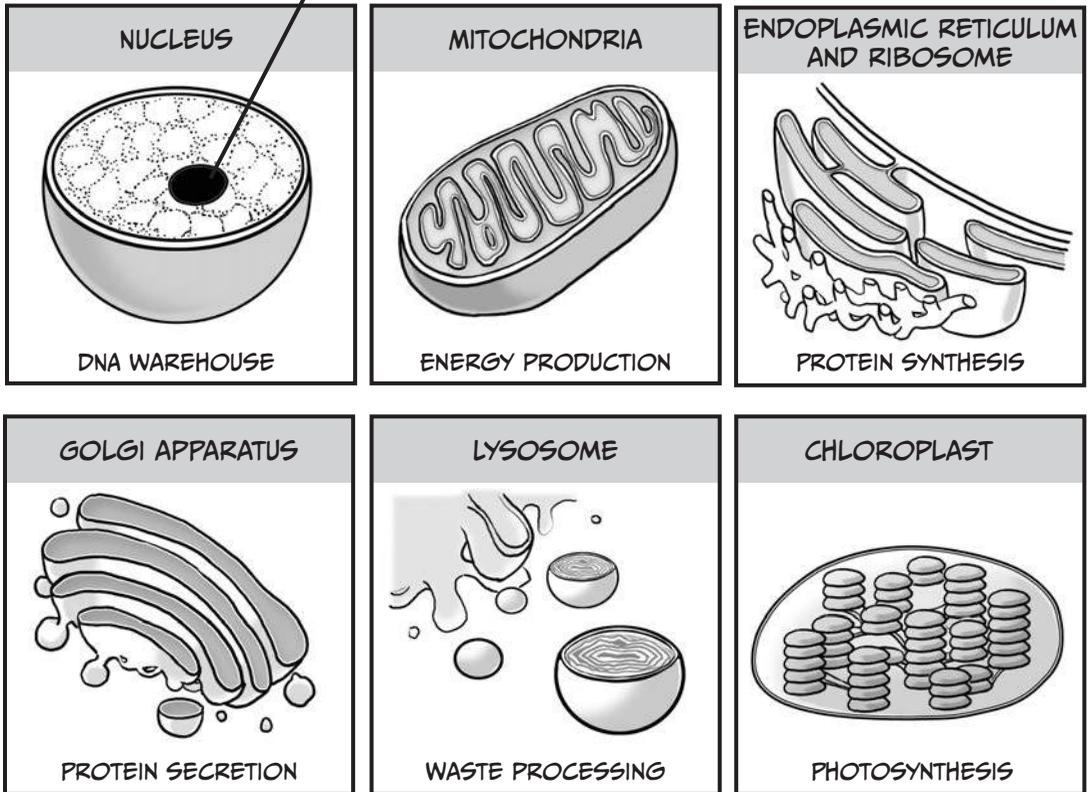
PHOSPHATE GROUP	→	HYDROPHILIC (ATTRACTED TO WATER)
FATTY ACID	→	HYDROPHOBIC (REPELLED BY WATER)

PHOSPHOLIPIDS FORM A *BILAYER* WITH THEIR WATER-REPELLED TAILS POINTING INWARD AND THEIR WATER-ATTRACTED HEADS POINTING OUTWARD.



THE NUCLEUS CONTAINS DEOXYRIBONUCLEIC ACID, OR DNA, WHICH ENCODES GENES AND IS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS THE "BLUEPRINT" FOR LIFE.

THE NUCLEUS IS REFERRED TO AS THE "CONTROL CENTER" OF THE CELL.

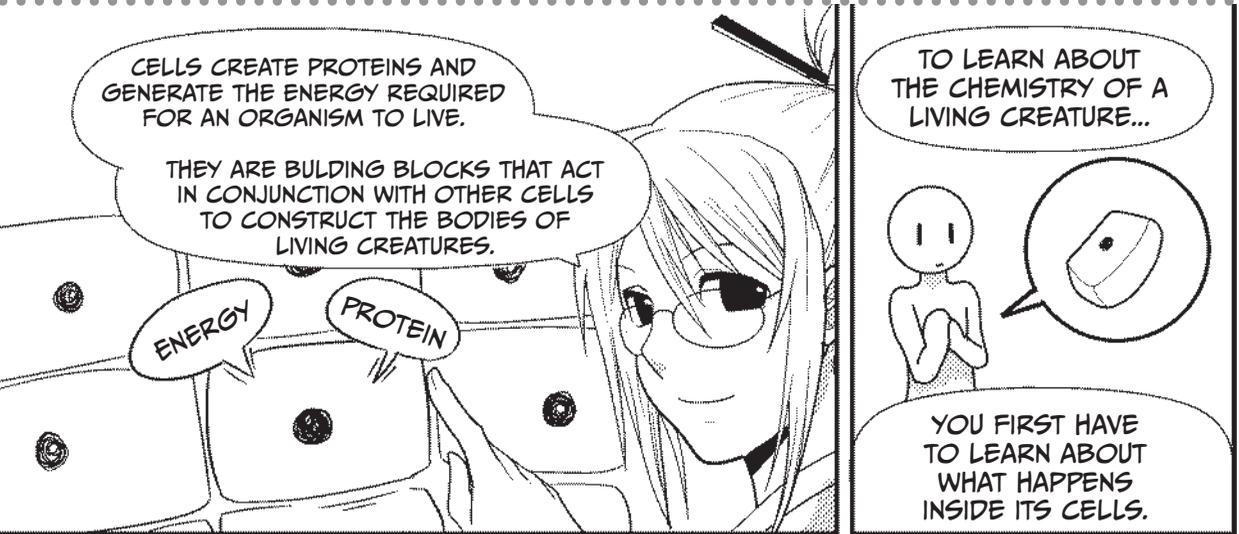


CHLOROPLASTS ARE FOUND ONLY IN PLANTS AND SOME MICROBES.



SCRIBBLE
SCRIBBLE

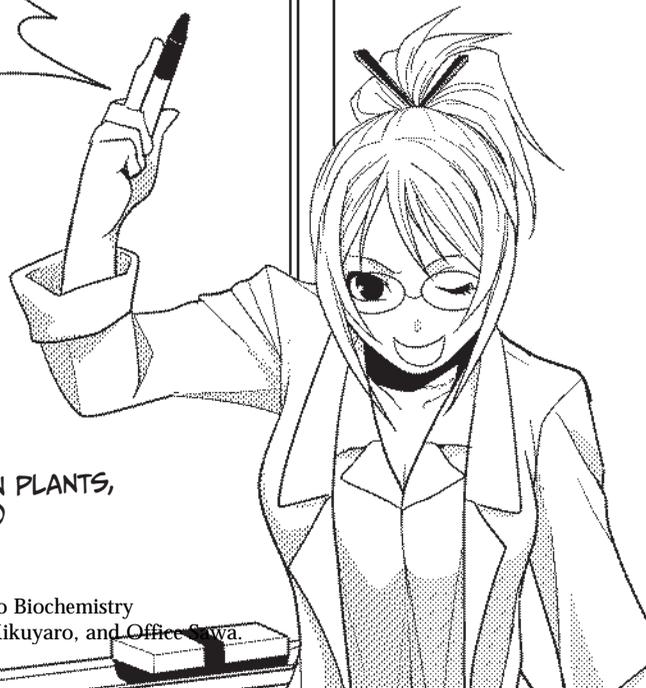
2. What Happens Inside a Cell?



HERE'S WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE A CELL!

THERE ARE OTHER DETAILS WE'LL LEARN ABOUT LATER, BUT FOR NOW WE'LL JUST TALK ABOUT THESE FOUR MAIN PROCESSES.

- 1 PROTEIN SYNTHESIS
- 2 METABOLISM
- 3 ENERGY PRODUCTION
- 4 PHOTOSYNTHESIS (OCCURS IN PLANTS, ALGAE, AND SOME BACTERIA)



PROTEIN SYNTHESIS

WHEN YOU HEAR "PROTEIN," YOU PROBABLY THINK OF THE NUTRIENTS FOUND IN FOODS, BUT...



FOR LIVING CREATURES LIKE US, PROTEINS ARE VITAL SUBSTANCES THAT ARE LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR KEEPING OUR BODIES FUNCTIONING.

WOW, ARE PROTEINS REALLY THAT DELICIOUS, ER, I MEAN, IMPORTANT?



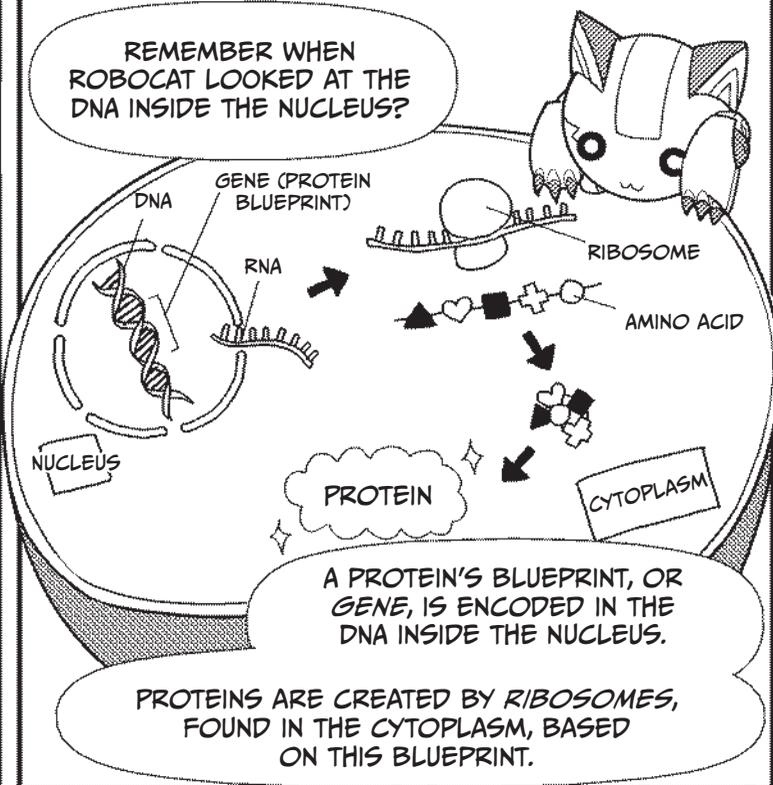
ABSOLUTELY! OUR BODIES ARE MAINTAINED BY DIFFERENT PROTEINS CARRYING OUT THEIR DUTIES.

- MAINTENANCE OF CELLULAR STRUCTURE
- DIGESTION
- MUSCLE CREATION
- PROTECTION FROM VIRAL, FUNGAL, AND PARASITIC INFECTIONS



PROTEINS ARE CONTINUOUSLY MANUFACTURED BY EVERY CELL IN OUR BODY.

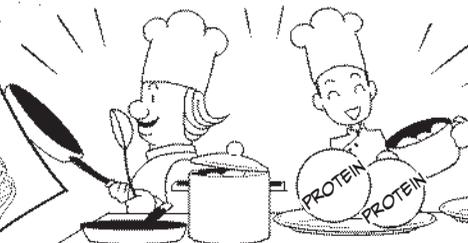
REMEMBER WHEN ROBOCAT LOOKED AT THE DNA INSIDE THE NUCLEUS?



A PROTEIN'S BLUEPRINT, OR GENE, IS ENCODED IN THE DNA INSIDE THE NUCLEUS.

PROTEINS ARE CREATED BY RIBOSOMES, FOUND IN THE CYTOPLASM, BASED ON THIS BLUEPRINT.

RECIPE

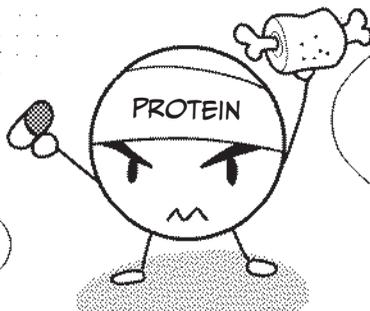


THE RIBOSOMES ARE LIKE CHEFS FOLLOWING A RECIPE TO MAKE A MEAL!

METABOLISM

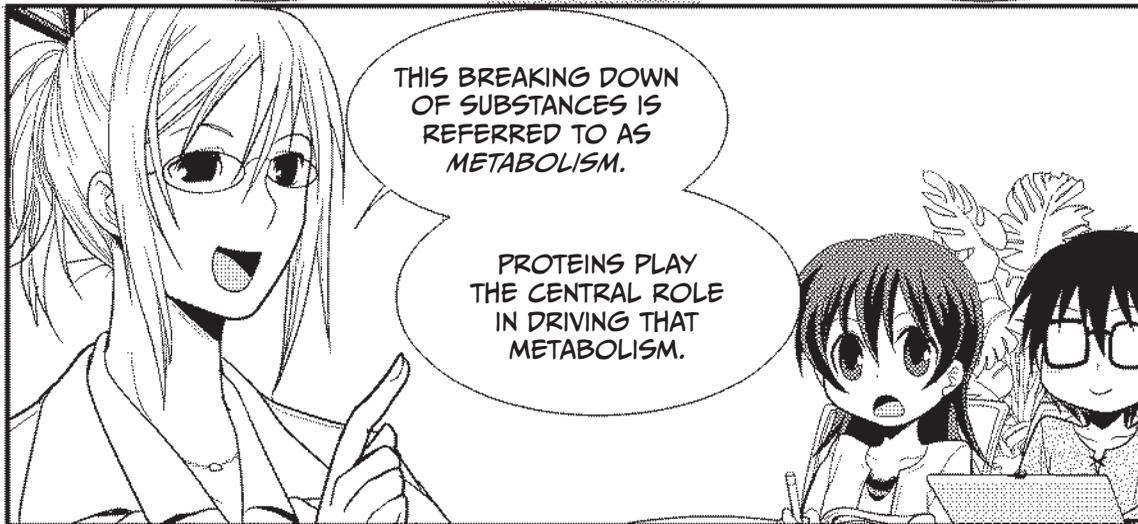
ONCE PROTEINS ARE CREATED, THEY DO IMPORTANT JOBS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CELLS.

ONE OF THESE JOBS IS...



...CATALYZING THE BREAKDOWN OF FOODS OR MEDICINES THAT ENTER THE BODY INTO SOMETHING USEFUL

AND BREAKING DOWN UNNECESSARY OR HARMFUL SUBSTANCES INTO SOMETHING THAT CAN BE EXPELLED MORE EASILY.



THIS BREAKING DOWN OF SUBSTANCES IS REFERRED TO AS METABOLISM.

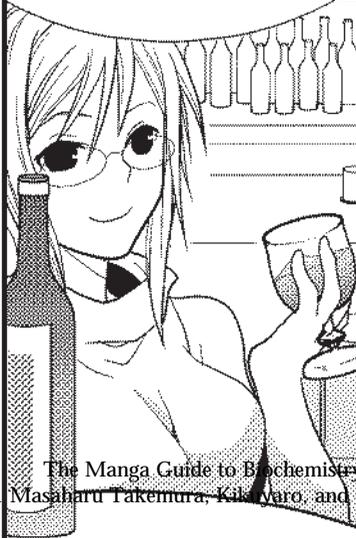
PROTEINS PLAY THE CENTRAL ROLE IN DRIVING THAT METABOLISM.

BREAKING DOWN FOOD INTO NUTRIENTS, ABSORBING THESE NUTRIENTS, AND CHANGING THEM INTO SUBSTANCES YOUR BODY CAN USE TO REPLENISH ITSELF... THESE ARE ALL JOBS FOR SPECIALIZED PROTEINS!



FOR EXAMPLE, SINCE ALCOHOL IS HIGHLY TOXIC TO THE BODY, IT'S BROKEN DOWN BY LIVER CELLS AND CHANGED INTO A NONTOXIC SUBSTANCE.

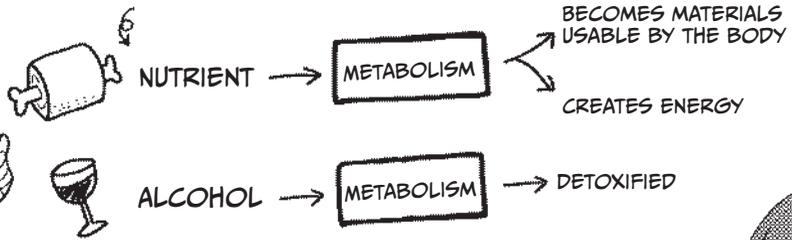
THIS IS ALSO THE JOB OF A SPECIALIZED PROTEIN!



THE MEDICINE YOU TAKE WHEN YOU'RE SICK NEEDS TO BE BROKEN DOWN AS WELL. PROTEINS IN THE LIVER HELP YOUR BODY SIMPLIFY THAT MEDICINE INTO SUBSTANCES THAT PRODUCE THE DESIRED HEALING EFFECT IN THE RIGHT LOCATION.



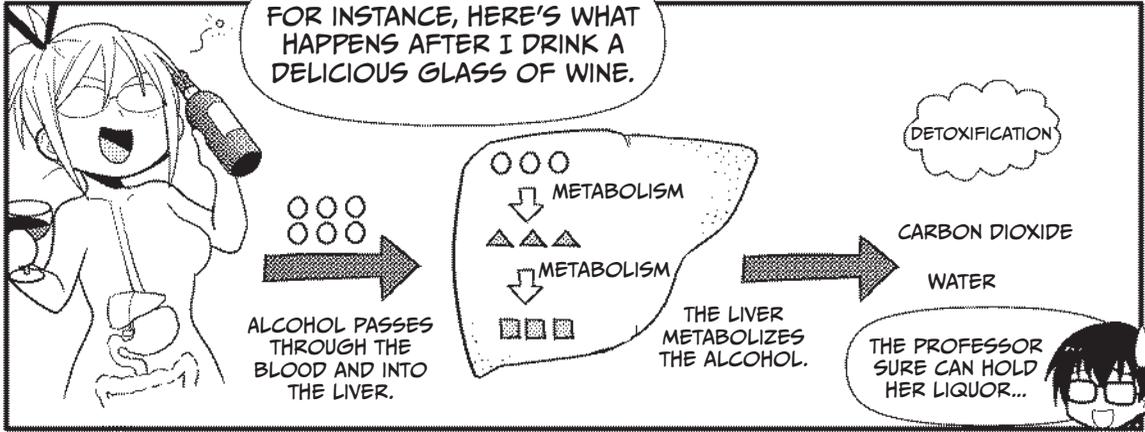
(PROTEINS, FATS, CARBOHYDRATES, VITAMINS, MINERALS, AND SO ON)



THINGS YOU EAT OR DRINK ARE GENERALLY METABOLIZED LIKE THIS.

I SEE...

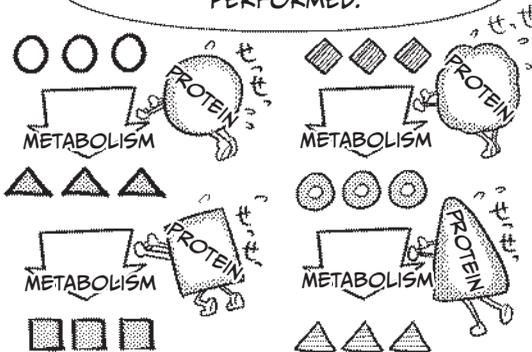
FOR INSTANCE, HERE'S WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I DRINK A DELICIOUS GLASS OF WINE.



THE PROFESSOR SURE CAN HOLD HER LIQUOR...

METABOLISM IS PERFORMED BY PROTEINS.

IN THE CELL MEMBRANE, THE CYTOPLASM, THE NUCLEUS, AND EVERY OTHER ORGANELLE, THE ROLES ARE DIVIDED AMONG MANY PROTEINS SO THAT METABOLISM IS CONSTANTLY PERFORMED.



WOW! PROTEINS ARE DILIGENTLY WORKING AWAY INSIDE MY BODY EVEN WHEN I'M EATING DINNER OR SLEEPING OFF A COLD...

JEEZ, MY CELLS WORK HARDER THAN I DO...

ENERGY PRODUCTION

BY THE WAY,
NEMOTO...

YOU SAID YOU
WERE RUNNING
LOW ON CASH
THIS MONTH,
DIDN'T YOU?

HEE HEE
HEE

WHAT?!

NO, I'M NOT!
I MEAN...

WELL, TO BE
HONEST, I
GUESS I AM A
LITTLE STRAPPED
FOR CASH.

IN TODAY'S
MODERN
SOCIETY, MONEY
IS ESSENTIAL
FOR ALMOST ANY
ACTIVITY, RIGHT?

I GOTTA STOP TELLING MY
PROFESSORS ABOUT
MY MONEY PROBLEMS...

IN A SIMILAR WAY,
CELLS HAVE SOMETHING
THAT IS ESSENTIAL FOR
THEIR ACTIVITY.

IT'S LIKE CURRENCY,
BUT IT'S USED FOR
CHEMICAL REACTIONS
IN OUR CELLS.

ATP

THIS IS THE SUBSTANCE
CALLED ADENOSINE
TRIPHOSPHATE, OR ATP.

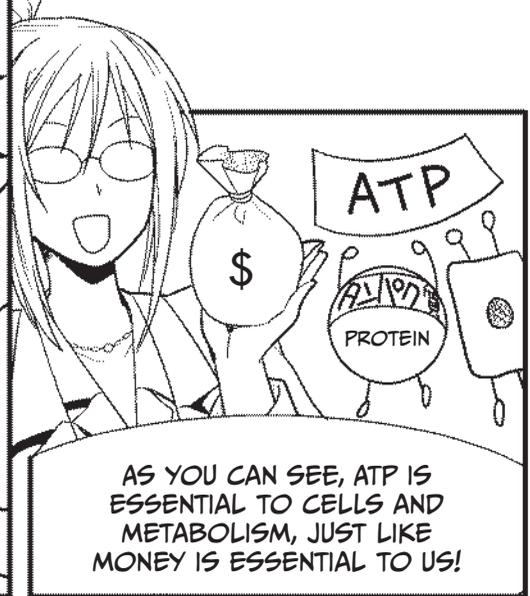
A-DEEN-OH...
WHAT?

UM...LET'S JUST
STICK WITH ATP.

ATP IS ESSENTIAL FOR MANY ACTIVITIES!

- SYNTHESIZING PROTEINS
- POWERING CHEMICAL REACTIONS
- PERFORMING PHOTOSYNTHESIS

ATP



AS YOU CAN SEE, ATP IS ESSENTIAL TO CELLS AND METABOLISM, JUST LIKE MONEY IS ESSENTIAL TO US!

YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING IF YOU DON'T HAVE MONEY TO SPEND...IT'S SO DEPRESSING.



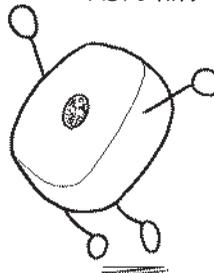
SNIFF

HAS MY MISFORTUNE MOVED HER TO TEARS? AMAZING!



TO MAINTAIN ESSENTIAL CELLULAR AND METABOLIC PROCESSES, CELLS MUST PRODUCE A CONSTANT SUPPLY OF ATP. TO DO THIS, THEY REQUIRE SUGAR CONTENT (THAT IS, SACCHARIDES*) AND OXYGEN.

GOTTA MAKE MORE ATP!



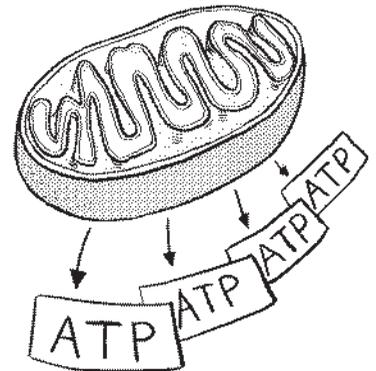
ATP IS CREATED BY MITOCHONDRIA AND PROTEINS FOUND IN THE CYTOSOL.



ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER DOLLAR!

IT'S NO EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT WE EAT AND BREATHE TO CREATE ATP, WHICH IS THEN USED TO FUND THE ACTIVITIES OF PROTEINS.

JUST LIKE WORKING TO EARN A LIVING, ISN'T IT?



REMEMBER: ATP IS THE "COMMON CURRENCY" OF ENERGY THAT'S USED BY PROTEINS TO KEEP US ALIVE.

* THESE SACCHARIDES ARE ALSO KNOWN AS CARBOHYDRATES.

PHOTOSYNTHESIS

OKAY...

THE LAST TOPIC WE'LL GO OVER TODAY IS PHOTOSYNTHESIS.

WE LEARNED ABOUT THAT IN SCHOOL!

GREEN PLANTS PERFORM PHOTOSYNTHESIS, RIGHT?

RIGHT!

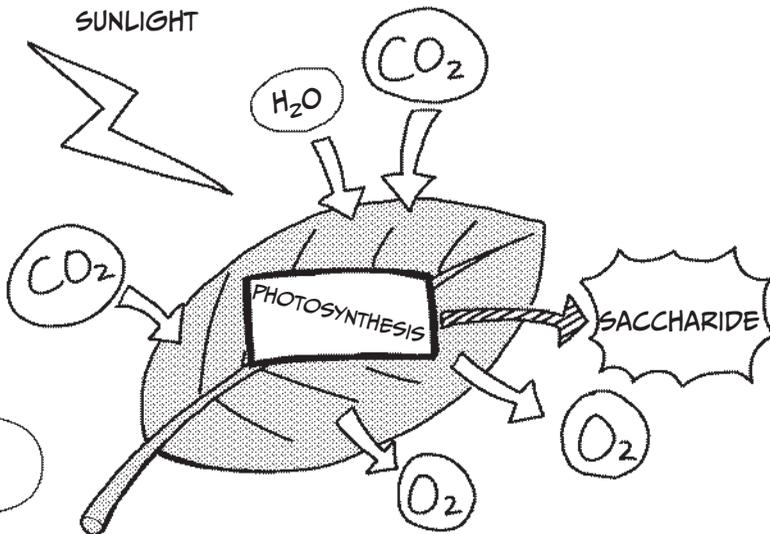
PROTEIN SYNTHESIS AND ENERGY PRODUCTION OCCUR IN THE CELLS OF ALL ORGANISMS...

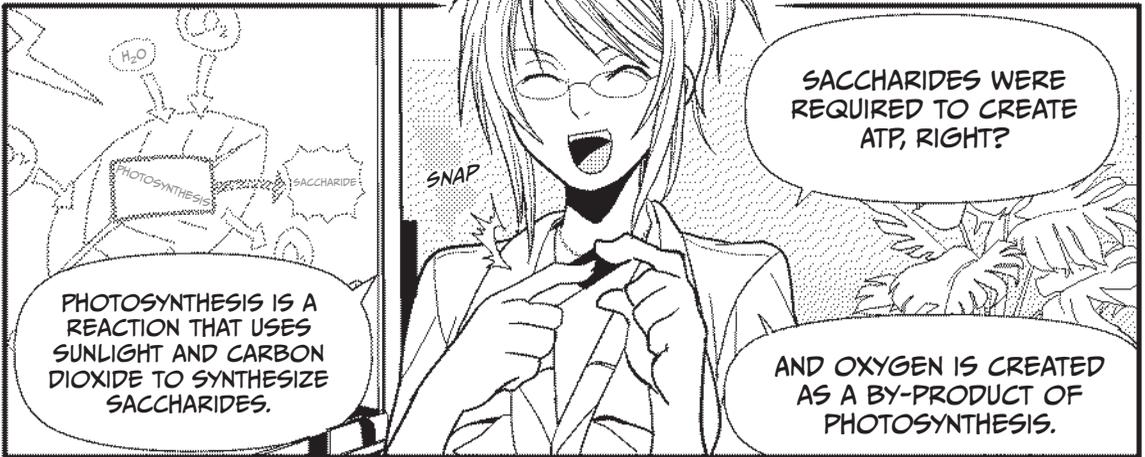
...BUT PHOTOSYNTHESIS CAN ONLY OCCUR IN THE CELLS OF PLANTS, ALGAE, AND SOME BACTERIA.

SUNLIGHT



NOW, LOOK AT THIS DIAGRAM.

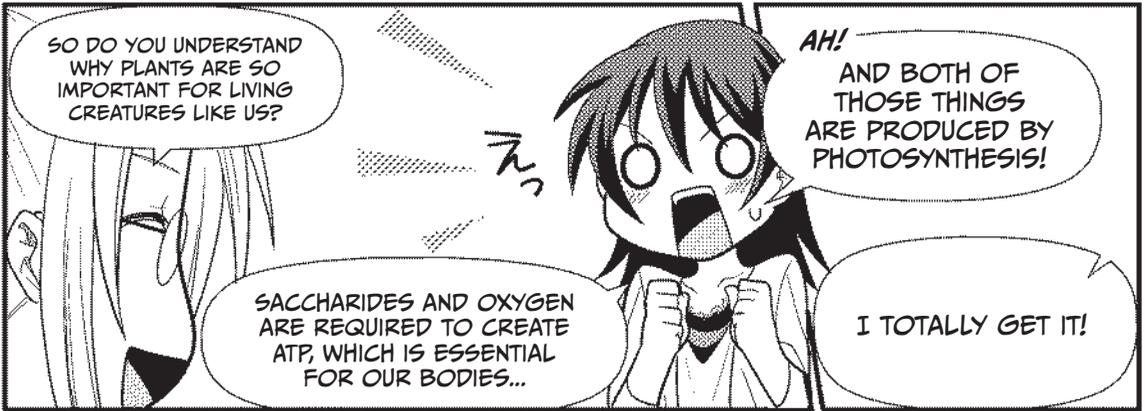




PHOTOSYNTHESIS IS A REACTION THAT USES SUNLIGHT AND CARBON DIOXIDE TO SYNTHESIZE SACCHARIDES.

SACCHARIDES WERE REQUIRED TO CREATE ATP, RIGHT?

AND OXYGEN IS CREATED AS A BY-PRODUCT OF PHOTOSYNTHESIS.

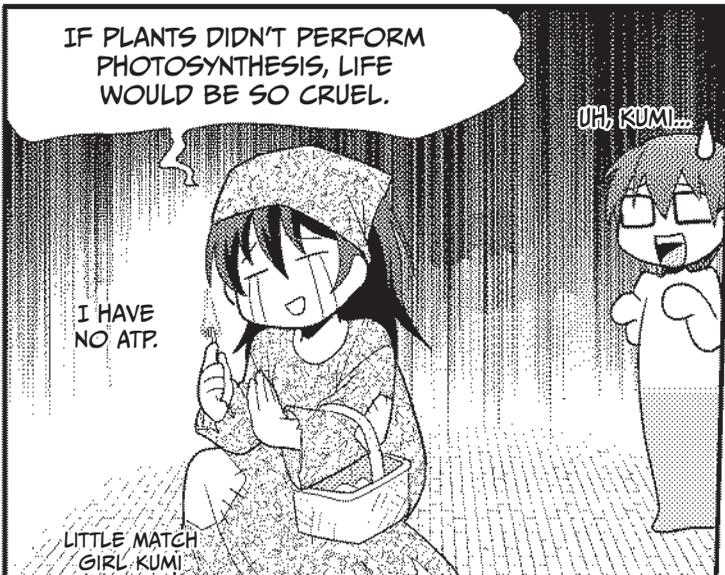


SO DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHY PLANTS ARE SO IMPORTANT FOR LIVING CREATURES LIKE US?

SACCHARIDES AND OXYGEN ARE REQUIRED TO CREATE ATP, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL FOR OUR BODIES...

AH!
AND BOTH OF THOSE THINGS ARE PRODUCED BY PHOTOSYNTHESIS!

I TOTALLY GET IT!

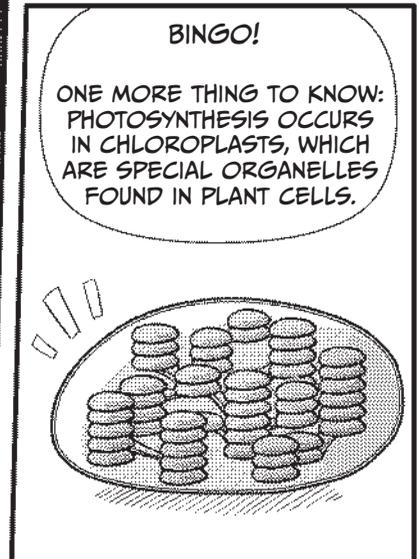


IF PLANTS DIDN'T PERFORM PHOTOSYNTHESIS, LIFE WOULD BE SO CRUEL.

I HAVE NO ATP.

LITTLE MATCH GIRL, KUMI

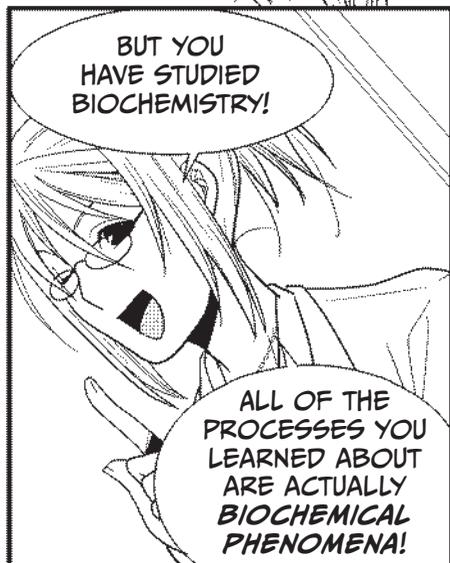
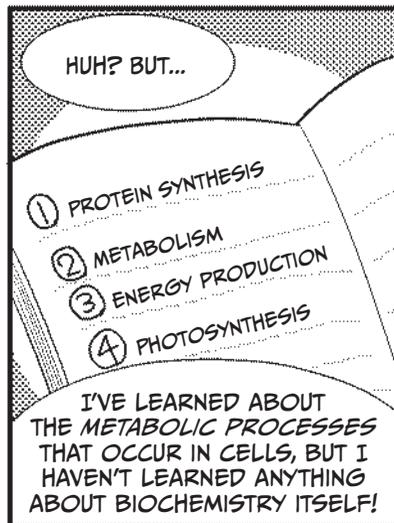
OH, KUMI...



BINGO!

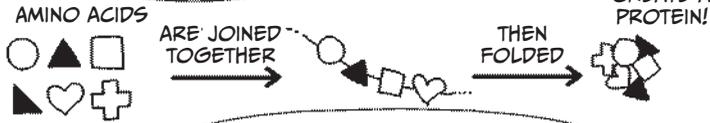
ONE MORE THING TO KNOW: PHOTOSYNTHESIS OCCURS IN CHLOROPLASTS, WHICH ARE SPECIAL ORGANELLES FOUND IN PLANT CELLS.

3. A Cell Is the Location of Many Chemical Reactions



BIOCHEMISTRY OF PROTEIN SYNTHESIS

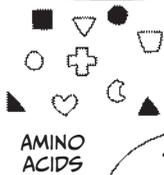
WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENS WHEN PROTEINS ARE SYNTHESIZED?



A PROTEIN IS ACTUALLY FORMED BY MANY SMALL MOLECULES CALLED AMINO ACIDS JOINING TOGETHER.



THERE ARE 20 COMMON TYPES OF AMINO ACIDS USED TO CREATE PROTEINS.



PROTEINS

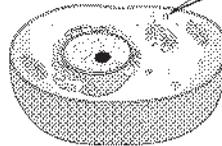
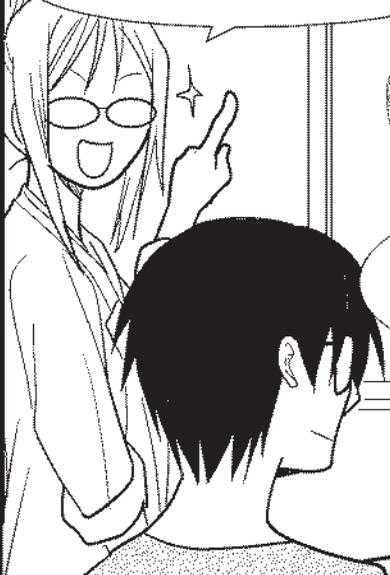
- +■→ MUSCLE CONTRACTION (ACTIN AND MYOSIN)
- ▲△○□→ ENZYMES
- ▽◇○→ ANTIBODIES
- ⊕●▲□→ HAIR (KERATIN)
- ▽▲□◇○→ SKIN (COLLAGEN)

THESE 20 TYPES CAN BE COMBINED IN DIFFERENT NUMBERS AND ORDERS TO CREATE VARIOUS TYPES OF PROTEINS.

THEY'RE LIKE LITTLE CANDY NECKLACES? HOW CUTE! AND HOW DELICIOUS...



PROTEIN SYNTHESIS IS CARRIED OUT BY RIBOSOMES, WHICH FLOAT IN THE CYTOPLASM OR ARE STUCK TO THE ENDOPLASMIC RETICULUM.



ZOOM!

RIBOSOME

A SNOWMAN?



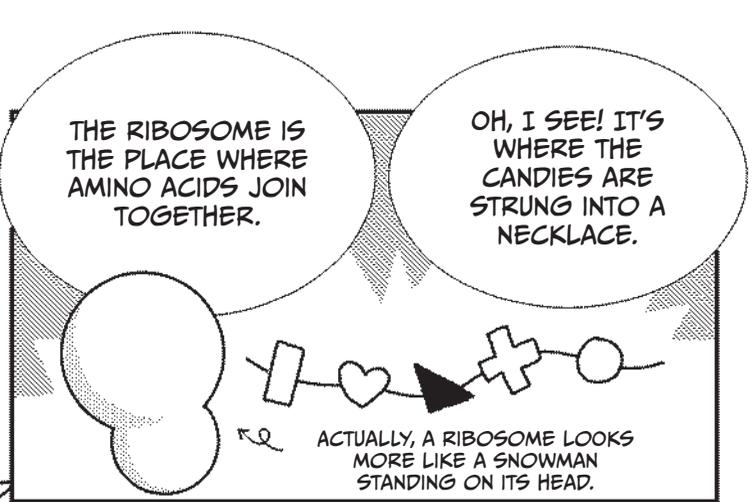
ALTHOUGH THEY LOOK LIKE LITTLE GRAINS OF RICE, IF WE ZOOM IN WE CAN SEE THAT THEY HAVE A STRANGE SHAPE.

ACTUALLY, IF WE SIMPLIFY IT A BIT, A RIBOSOME LOOKS A LOT LIKE A SNOWMAN.



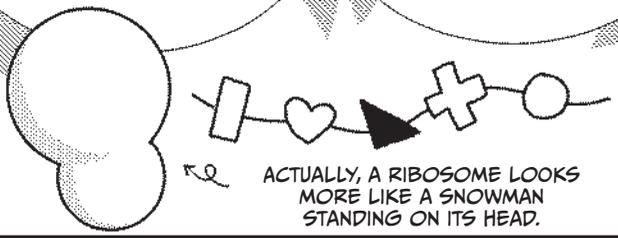


HOW DOES THE RIBOSOME MAKE PROTEINS?

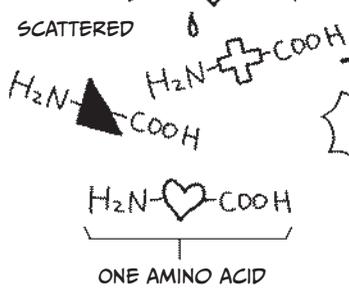


THE RIBOSOME IS THE PLACE WHERE AMINO ACIDS JOIN TOGETHER.

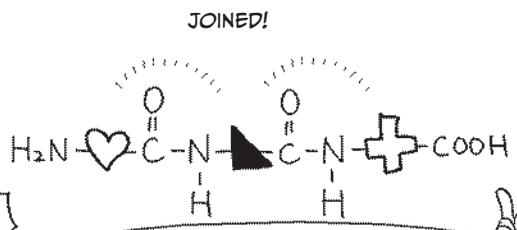
OH, I SEE! IT'S WHERE THE CANDIES ARE STRUNG INTO A NECKLACE.



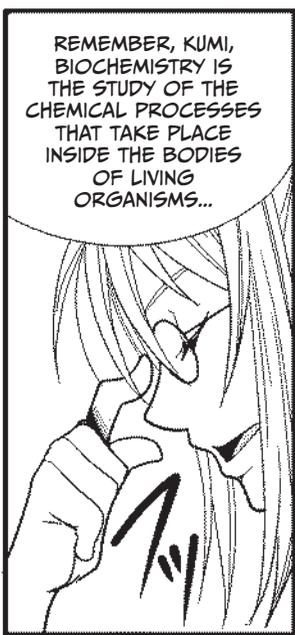
WHEN THESE AMINO ACIDS ARE "JOINED TOGETHER," THAT'S A KIND OF CHEMICAL REACTION, RIGHT?



CHEMICAL REACTION



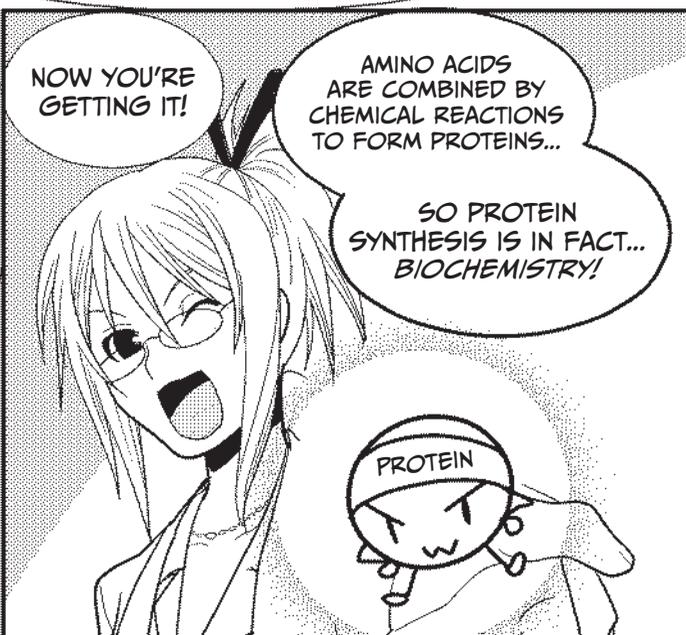
THAT'S RIGHT! THAT REACTION STICKS TWO DIFFERENT AMINO ACIDS TOGETHER. THEN ADDITIONAL REACTIONS PILE ON EVEN MORE AMINO ACIDS, AND PRETTY SOON YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF A PROTEIN!



REMEMBER, KUMI, BIOCHEMISTRY IS THE STUDY OF THE CHEMICAL PROCESSES THAT TAKE PLACE INSIDE THE BODIES OF LIVING ORGANISMS...



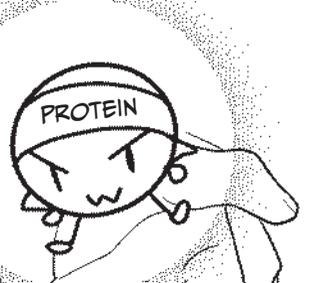
HEY! THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT NEMOTO SAID BACK AT MY HOUSE!



NOW YOU'RE GETTING IT!

AMINO ACIDS ARE COMBINED BY CHEMICAL REACTIONS TO FORM PROTEINS...

SO PROTEIN SYNTHESIS IS IN FACT... **BIOCHEMISTRY!**



BIOCHEMISTRY OF METABOLISM



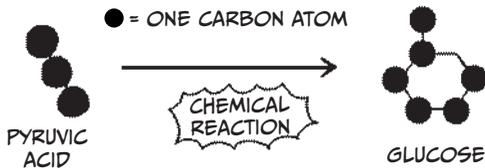
REMEMBER WHEN I SAID THAT CHANGING ONE SUBSTANCE INTO ANOTHER WAS CALLED METABOLISM?

SUBSTANCE A \longrightarrow SUBSTANCE B

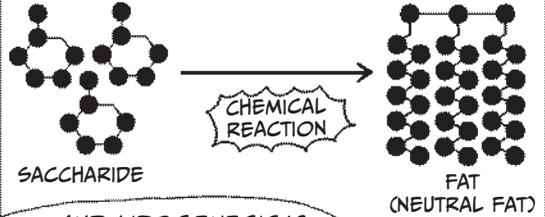
CHEMICAL REACTION

WELL, METABOLISM IS A CHEMICAL REACTION AS WELL!

MM HMM



FOR EXAMPLE, *GLUCONEOGENESIS*, WHICH IS PERFORMED BY LIVER OR KIDNEY CELLS, IS A CHEMICAL REACTION THAT CHANGES PYRUVIC ACID INTO A SACCHARIDE CALLED *GLUCOSE*.



AND *LIPOGENESIS* IS A CHEMICAL REACTION THAT CHANGES SACCHARIDES INTO FAT WHEN TOO MANY SACCHARIDES ARE ABSORBED INTO YOUR BODY.



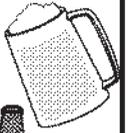
FAT?!

ARGGHHH!
DISGUSTING!
THAT CHEMICAL REACTION IS TOTALLY GROSS!

AND LET'S NOT FORGET ALCOHOL DETOXIFICATION!

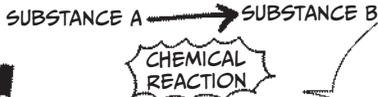
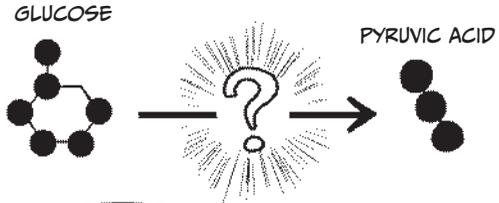
SO NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND, KUMI?

IF YOU'RE STUDYING METABOLISM, YOU'RE STUDYING BIOCHEMISTRY!



BIOCHEMISTRY OF ENERGY PRODUCTION

ENERGY PRODUCTION IS ALSO A KIND OF METABOLISM.

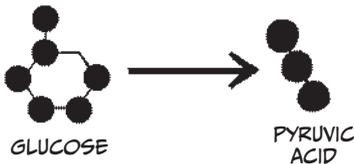


TO PRODUCE ENERGY, *GLUCOSE* IS FIRST BROKEN DOWN INTO *PYRUVIC ACID* IN CYTOSOL.

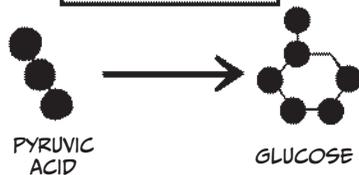
HUH? DIDN'T YOU MENTION *GLUCOSE* AND *PYRUVIC ACID* EARLIER?

YUP! THIS IS THE REVERSE VERSION OF *GLUCONEOGENESIS*, CALLED *GLYCOLYSIS*.

GLYCOLYSIS



GLUCONEOGENESIS



GLYCOLYSIS IS ALL ABOUT BREAKING DOWN SACCHARIDES!

BREAK IT DOWN, Y'ALL!





WELL, IT MAY SEEM EASY AT FIRST, BUT THE PROCESS IS ACTUALLY A LITTLE MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT.

GLUCOSE → ... → PYRUVIC ACID → KREBS → ETS → 38 [ATP] ENERGY + CO₂ + H₂O

CHEMICAL REACTIONS

CHEMICAL REACTIONS

O₂

GLUCOSE

PYRUVIC ACID

KREBS

ETS

38 [ATP] ENERGY

CO₂ + H₂O

CYTOPLASM ← | → MITOCHONDRIA

WOW! LOTS OF CHEMICAL REACTIONS...

YUP, BREAKING DOWN GLUCOSE IS TRICKIER THAN YOU THOUGHT, EH?

MITOCHONDRIA USE PYRUVIC ACID AND OXYGEN TO CREATE ENERGY (ATP).

THIS ENERGY PRODUCTION IS A COMPLEX PROCESS THAT CONSISTS OF MANY CHEMICAL REACTIONS OCCURRING SIMULTANEOUSLY IN DIFFERENT PLACES.

PYRUVIC ACID

OXYGEN (O₂)

MITOCHONDRIA ARE BUSY LITTLE GUYS, AREN'T THEY?

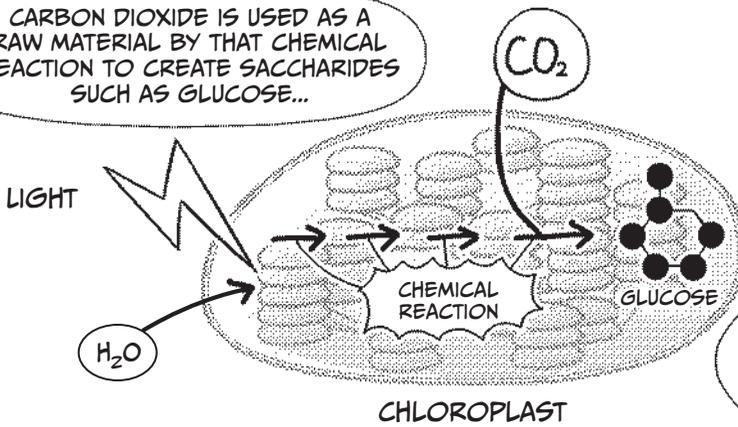
ATP ATP ATP

BIOCHEMISTRY OF PHOTOSYNTHESIS

FINALLY, LET'S LOOK AT PHOTOSYNTHESIS IN PLANTS.

A COMPLEX CHEMICAL REACTION OCCURS WHEN LIGHT STRIKES CHLOROPLASTS IN A PLANT'S CELLS.

CARBON DIOXIDE IS USED AS A RAW MATERIAL BY THAT CHEMICAL REACTION TO CREATE SACCHARIDES SUCH AS GLUCOSE...



SO, KUMI, WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED ABOUT ALL OF THESE CELLULAR PROCESSES? DO THEY HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON?

HUH? UM...WELL...

- ① PROTEIN SYNTHESIS
- ② METABOLISM
- ③ ENERGY PRODUCTION
- ④ SYNTHESIS

THEY'RE ALL CHEMICAL REACTIONS?

YOU GOT IT!

KUMI GETS A GOLD STAR!

IF THERE'S ONE THING YOU SHOULD GET OUT OF TODAY'S LESSON...

IT'S THAT ALL OF THE PROCESSES THAT OCCUR IN OUR CELLS ARE CHEMICAL REACTIONS!

COUNTLESS CHEMICAL REACTIONS ARE TAKING PLACE INSIDE YOU, EVEN AS WE SPEAK!

CHEMICAL REACTIONS
① ② ③ ④

WOW...

THAT'S KIND OF SCARY.

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT THEY ARE HAPPENING UNBELIEVABLY FAST—IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE!

IT'S AMAZING TO BE ALIVE...

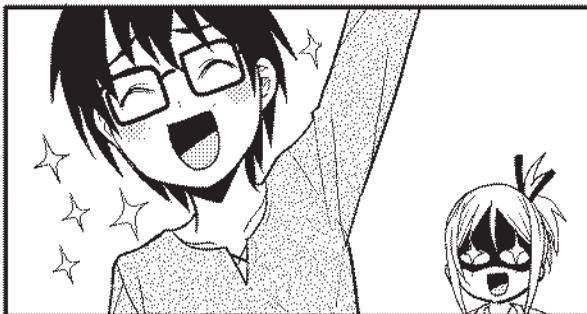
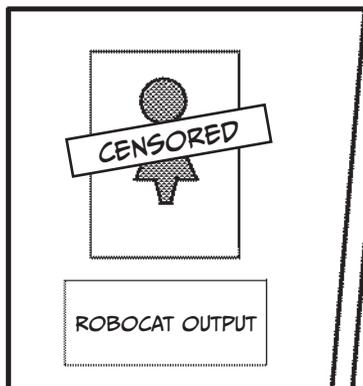
AND THE FACT THAT ALL OF THIS IS GOING ON INSIDE SUCH TEENY, TINY CELLS... IT'S MIND-BLOWING!

TIGHT REGULATION OF THESE PROCESSES ENSURES THAT EVERYTHING OCCURS IN THE PROPER ORDER, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO CELL LIFE.

BIOCHEMISTRY REALLY IS INTERESTING!

OKAY!

LET'S END TODAY'S LESSON HERE!



WHAT? NO WAY!
I JUST WANT TO GET
PEOPLE INTERESTED
IN BIOCHEMISTRY,
THAT'S ALL!

WHATEVER
YOU SAY...

BUT I THINK YOU
TWO HAVE SOME
"CHEMISTRY"
OF YOUR OWN.

THAT'S CRAZY! I'M JUST
AN INNOCENT SCIENTIST!
I WOULD NEVER-

OKAY, NEMOTO,
SAY NO MORE.
I UNDERSTAND.

I HAVEN'T SEEN A
BOY THIS HEAD-
OVER-HEELS IN
YEARS.

THERE'S
ONLY ONE
THING I
CAN DO!

JUST CALL ME...
THE PROFESSOR
OF LOVE! ♪

4. Fundamental Biochemistry Knowledge

In this section, we'll explain some technical terms that you need to know to study biochemistry.

CARBON

First, we'll examine an extremely important chemical element in biochemistry—*carbon*.

Carbon is the element identified by chemical symbol C and possessing the atomic number 6 and an atomic weight of 12.0107. It's the primary component of all known life, which is why people sometimes refer to Earth's organisms as "carbon-based life." Carbon is the backbone of all organic compounds, and the bodies of living organisms are made almost entirely out of these compounds. Carbon is ideal as a backbone for complex organic molecules such as biopolymers, because it forms four stable bonds, which is an unusually high number for an element. Proteins, lipids, saccharides, nucleic acids, and vitamins are all built with carbon as a framework.

Although carbon is common on Earth—in the biosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, and hydrosphere—there is a finite amount of it, so it's recycled and reused. Over time, a carbon atom passes through air, soil, rocks, and living creatures via biogeochemical cycles. The carbon in your body today may have once been inside a dinosaur!

CHEMICAL BONDS

When carbon combines with other elements, such as oxygen, hydrogen, or nitrogen, different chemical compounds are produced. Except for certain gases, like helium and argon, almost all chemical substances are composed of *molecules*, two or more atoms attached via a *chemical bond*. For example, a water molecule (H_2O) is created when two hydrogen atoms (H) and one oxygen atom (O) join together.

There are several different types of chemical bonds. Some examples include: *covalent bonds*, in which electrons are shared between a pair of atoms, *ionic bonds*, in which oppositely-charged atoms are attracted to one another, and *metallic bonds*, in which a pool of electrons swirl around numerous metal atoms.

The four stable bonds that carbon forms are all covalent bonds.

BIOPOLYMERS

Biopolymers are extremely important molecules to the study of biochemistry.

Biopolymer is a generic term for large, modular organic molecules. Modular means "assembled from repeating units," like the beads of a necklace. Proteins, lipids, nucleic acid, and polysaccharides are all biopolymers. Because they tend to be especially large molecules, biopolymers can form complex structures, which makes them very useful in advanced systems such as cells.

Biopolymers can form these complex chains because they're more than simple beads. Let's consider proteins, for example. Imagine a protein as a necklace made from a variety of different LEGO blocks that can all connect to one another. Since you can twist the necklace

easily, it doesn't matter whether the blocks are close together or far apart, but the individual properties of each block result in some connecting better than others. If this necklace was a mile long, imagine the many strange and complex forms you could build. This isn't precisely how proteins function, but you get the idea.

ENZYMES

Since biochemistry explains life from a chemical point of view, it is vital to understand how chemical reactions work, and *enzymes* are essential to these reactions. Enzymes are proteins that act as catalysts—that is, they increase the rate of chemical reactions. An enzyme catalyzes nearly every chemical reaction that occurs in an organism.

In a chemical reaction catalyzed by an enzyme, the substance that the enzyme acts upon is called the *substrate*. The new substance that's formed during the reaction is called the *product*. The activity of an enzyme is affected by the environment inside the organism (temperature, pH, and other factors), the availability of the substrate, and, in some cases, the concentration of the product.

Although almost all enzymes are proteins, it has recently been discovered that a special type of ribonucleic acid (RNA) can act as a catalyst in certain chemical reactions. This is called an RNA enzyme, or a *ribozyme*.

OXIDATION-REDUCTION

Enzymes are broadly classified into six types, which will be introduced in detail in Chapter 4. *Oxidation-reduction* is one of the most important enzyme reactions, in which electrons are exchanged between two substances. If electrons are lost, the substance is *oxidized*, and if electrons are gained, the substance is *reduced*. Normally, when one substance is oxidized, another substance is reduced, so oxidation and reduction are said to occur simultaneously.

The movement of hydrogen ions (H^+ , aka protons) often accompanies the exchange of electrons in an organism, and NADPH, NADH, and similar compounds (which we'll discuss in Chapter 2) work as *reducing agents* on other substances.

RESPIRATION

In Chapter 2, we will examine *respiration*. In the broadest sense, respiration is the process of obtaining energy by breaking down large compounds, but this only gives us a vague sense of the meaning.

More specifically, when respiration occurs, an organic substance (for example, the carbohydrates that make up spaghetti) is broken down into simple, inorganic components, like carbon dioxide (CO_2) and water (H_2O). Energy is produced when electrons are transferred between molecules (oxidation-reduction), along a sort of factory line, until they reach oxygen (O_2). This process is known as *internal respiration* or *cellular respiration*.

The oxygen we mentioned above is very important in respiration. It comes from the air that we breathe, and carbon dioxide is produced as a waste product of cellular respiration. When we use our lungs to inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, it's known as *external respiration*.

METABOLISM

The processes that alter an organism's chemical substances are called *metabolism*. Broadly speaking, metabolism can be divided into *substance metabolism* and *energy metabolism*. However, since these two types occur together during metabolism, the distinction isn't very clear. In this book, when we refer to metabolism, you may assume that we mean substance metabolism.

Substance metabolism This refers to the changes to substances that occur in an organism, including the chemical reactions that are catalyzed by enzymes. More specifically, a reaction that breaks down a complex substance into simpler substances is called *catabolism*, and, conversely, a reaction that synthesizes a more complex substance is called *anabolism*.

Energy metabolism This refers to the energy that's gained or lost through anabolic and catabolic processes within an organism, including reactions in which the energy created via respiration or photosynthesis is stored as ATP and other high-energy intermediates.