

Engineers and chemistry

Chemistry is one of the subjects which engineers study in a pure, theoretical form and then apply to solve problems in the real world. For instance, did you know that the making of steel is chemistry?



Steel is a very strong and versatile metal. It is used in hundreds of ways, to reinforce bridges and roads, to build automotive bodies, to support huge buildings and to make cutlery, just to name a few. Steel is made by mixing iron compounds with carbon and limestone under temperatures of more than 500°C. Depending on what the steel will be used for, other metallic compounds may be added to the molten mixture in order to get specific properties in the final product like strength, chemical-resistance or hardness. For example, the addition of chromium in carefully measured amounts creates stainless steel, something you probably have in your home. Stainless steel is used to make cutlery, sinks and surgical tools because of its high resistance to rust.

Chemical engineers study and develop chemically-based industrial processes by understanding how and why the elements interact. They might apply this knowledge to figuring out how to remove pollution from a river or mine, how to get plastic wrap from petrochemical products or how to burn coal more cleanly and efficiently. What chemical engineers do with chemistry is very complex, but it all begins with a basic understanding of some very small particles.

Atoms

The smallest unit of each element is the atom. Atoms are made up of three different types of particles - protons, electrons, and neutrons.



What do oppositely charged particles do?



Protons have a positive charge.

Electrons have a negative charge..

Neutrons have no charge, and therefore are not attractive.

All atoms have the same number of protons and electrons, and are neutrally charged.

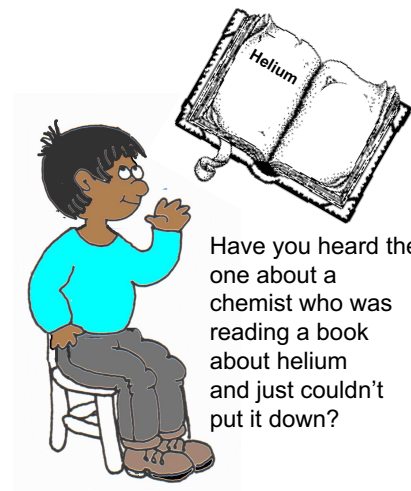
What does neutrally charged mean?

Atomic Number	Atomic Mass
↓	↓
26	55.8
Fe	

Protons and neutrons are the only parts of the atom which have any mass.

In the Periodic Table, 2 numbers appear beside each element. The whole number is the element's atomic number and is equal to the number of protons it has. The other number is the element's atomic mass. Neutrons and protons have almost exactly the same mass, so you can figure out the number of neutrons in an element by subtracting the atomic number from the atomic mass.

Number of neutrons = atomic mass- atomic number.

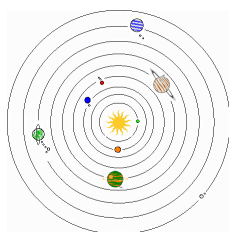


Atom Ant, the world's smallest superhero.

Source: <http://www.animation.usa.com/hb.html>

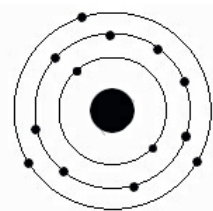
A model atom

Just like a building, an atom of any element has a distinct structure. And just like a building, there are rules as to how that structure is put together. In the center of the atom is a heavy nucleus; this is where the protons and neutrons are. Massless electrons orbit the nucleus. So a model of an atom, looks a bit like a model of the solar system.



Solar System

What is different about the models?



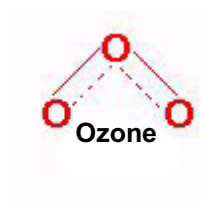
Atom

Not all electrons orbit at the same distance from the nucleus. In fact, electrons orbit the nucleus at several distinct energy levels, each of which can hold a different number of electrons. The first energy level can hold up to 2 electrons, the second up to 8. As you get further from the nucleus the orbits hold more electrons.

Molecules

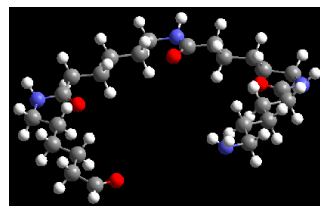
When atoms join together they make molecules.

O_3 is the chemical designation for a molecule of ozone. From it we can tell that each ozone molecule is made up of 3 oxygen atoms.



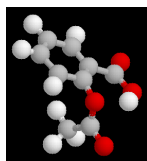
Ozone

Molecules can be fairly simple and small like water or they can huge; plastics are made up of extremely long chains of atoms.



Nylon

Things like aspirin fall in the middle somewhere.



Aspirin

The chemical formula for water is H_2O . Can you explain what this means?

2

Chemicals in nature

Chemistry and chemicals play a role in just about everything you see. Our bodies are teeming chemical factories where thousands of molecules interact to make our hearts beat, to digest food and to help us grow. Plants would not survive without chemicals, in fact very little would exist. By harnessing the power of chemicals in nature, people have been able to use them for a number of purposes.

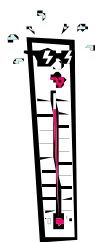
How do we get things like aspirin?

The active ingredient in aspirin, salicylic acid, is related to an ingredient found in white willow bark called salicin. Aspirin is produced in a complex industrial chemical process and reduces fever, swelling and pain. Willow bark tea does exactly the same thing because boiling the bark in water releases salicin. The healing properties of willow bark have been known to the Chinese and Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years; they were only recognized by western scientists in the 1800s century and today's form of buffered aspirin was developed in 1897.



Physical and chemical changes

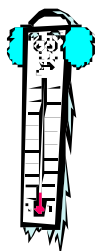
Matter and changes in matter are key concerns of people studying chemistry. There are two types of change which matter can undergo.



Physical change: Physical changes are also known as changes in state. Matter exists in three states, solid, liquid and gas.

*What is the difference between the states?
Can you identify the 3 states of water?*

Physical changes usually occur with changes in temperature or changes in pressure.

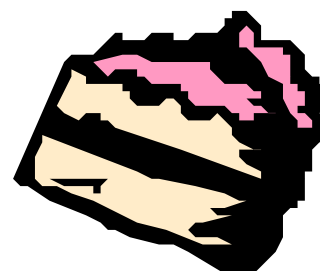


Can you think of anything which undergoes a physical change due to pressure?

No matter what kind of physical change a substance has undergone, it remains exactly the same chemically.

Chemical change: In a chemical change, two or more substances or compounds are mixed together and become something completely new.

Baking a cake is a chemical change.

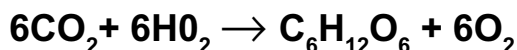


What are the differences between physical and chemical changes?

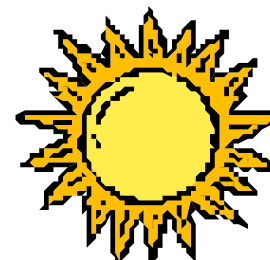
Chemical reactions

Chemical changes take place because the elements in the compounds being combined react with one another. The chemical reaction that takes place in baking a cake involves a lot of different compounds. It would be very difficult to write down all the different chemical changes which occur in that process. But, we know that eggs, flour, milk and chocolate combine to become delicious! In laboratories, however, chemists do write down what happens using specialized symbols and abbreviations in the form of equations.

This is the chemical equation for photosynthesis, the method by which plants get nourishment from the sun.



What does the equation tell us?



It tells us that plants take carbon dioxide and water from their environments and through a chemical reaction convert them into glucose and oxygen. Plants use the glucose as food and emit the oxygen into the atmosphere.

What does the equation not tell us?

The equation doesn't tell us that photosynthesis requires more than just carbon dioxide and water. It also requires sunlight and a green pigment called chlorophyll. Chlorophyll converts the energy from the sun into chemical energy which is used by the plant to drive a number of chemical reactions, including photosynthesis.

What else can you say about the equation?

Aboriginal people and chemistry

Aboriginal peoples could not have survived without an understanding of chemical properties and reactions. Many traditional practices which continue today involve chemistry in some form.

Clothing manufacture: Making leather from animal skins involves a chemical reaction between the skin, water and the animal brains used for tanning. The reactions which take place in the tanning process break down the properties of the animal skin and enable it to be transformed into leather.

Dyes and household products: Many plants and berries produce dyes which can be used on clothing and for other decorative purposes. Blueberries make a purple dye and Goldenrod makes a yellow one. Plants can also be used for "household" purposes. The chemical makeup of the horsetail flower includes silica which is a good wood polish.



Source: <http://www.healingearth.com/btar/images/hides.jpeg>

Waterproofing: Animal fat, spruce gum and plants can be used as waterproofing agents on canoes, clothing and dwellings.



Food preservation: Aboriginal peoples have used a number of methods of food preservation which require an understanding of the chemical change that takes place in the food. In pemmican, animal fat serves as a preservative so the mixture will last for long journeys. Smoking and drying are also preserving methods; they rid meat and fish of excess moisture which might cause it to rot before it can be eaten.

Medicinals: The chemical properties of plants were recognized by Aboriginal people for their medicinal uses. Juniper berries, for instance, can be crushed to stop mosquito from biting. They contain a chemical substance which acts as an insect repellent.

Sources

On-line

1. The Aspirin Foundation of America
<http://www.aspirin.org/>
2. Chemistry
<http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/science2/chem-e.html>
3. Delicious On-line
<http://www.delicious-online.com/health/articles/injd0696hs.html>

4. Molecule of the Month: Aspirin
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/Depts/Chemistry/MOTM/aspirin/aspirin.htm>
5. The Ozone Notepad
<http://tiger.chm.bris.ac.uk/cm1/EloiseS/>
6. Periodic Table of Elements
<http://www.universe.digex.net/~kkhan/periodic.html>

7. Stainless Steel Information Centre
<http://www.ssina.com/student.html>

Books

Physical Science: Discovering Matter and Energy, Copp Clark Pittman Ltd., 1991

Math problems

- You are a science teacher who has ordered special periodic table posters for your class. Each poster shows an element, its atomic weight and number, and the number of protons, neutrons and electrons it has. When the posters arrive you find that some of the values have been left blank! Can you fill them in so you can use the posters in class?

<p>12 24.3</p> <p>Mg</p> <p>Protons: 12</p> <p>Neutrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Electrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Magnesium</p>	<p><input type="text"/> 190.2</p> <p>Os</p> <p>Protons: 76</p> <p>Neutrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Electrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Osmium</p>	<p><input type="text"/> 261.1</p> <p>Unq</p> <p>Protons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Neutrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Electrons: 104</p> <p>Unnilquadium</p>	<p>50 <input type="text"/></p> <p>Sn</p> <p>Protons: 50</p> <p>Neutrons: 69</p> <p>Electrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Tin</p>
<p>2 4.0</p> <p>He</p> <p>Protons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Neutrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Electrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Helium</p>	<p><input type="text"/> 244.1</p> <p>Pu</p> <p>Protons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Neutrons: 150</p> <p>Electrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Plutonium</p>	<p><input type="text"/> 196.9</p> <p>Au</p> <p>Protons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Neutrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Electrons: 79</p> <p>Gold</p>	<p>70 173.0</p> <p>Yb</p> <p>Protons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Neutrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Electrons: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Ytterbium</p>

- The human body is 63.2% hydrogen, 25.6% oxygen, 9.5% carbon, 1.3% nitrogen, 0.2% phosphorus and 0.2% other elements. You are a biochemical engineer who needs to present this information to your client in concrete terms.

- You decide to tell your client how many kilograms of each element is in his body. If he weighs 73 kg, how much of his weight is hydrogen? Oxygen? Carbon? Nitrogen? Phosphorus? Other?
- You then draw a pie chart which shows the proportion of each element in a human body. What does it look like?
- Finally you decide the best way to present your information is in the graph to the left. In this graph, what is the percentage of "Other" elements? What does it represent? Why?

