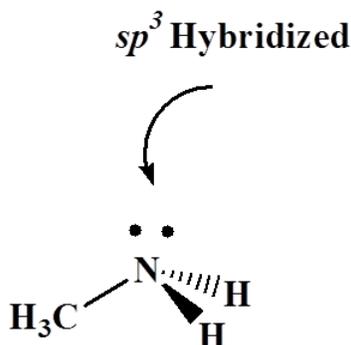


23.10: Structure and Bonding

Amines typically have three bonds and one pair of lone pair electrons. This makes the nitrogen sp^3 hybridized, trigonal pyramidal, with a bond angle of roughly 109.5° .



Stereogenic Nitrogen

Single-bonded nitrogen is pyramidal in shape, with the non-bonding electron pair pointing to the unoccupied corner of a tetrahedral region. Since the nitrogen in these compounds is bonded to three different groups, its configuration is chiral. The non-identical mirror-image configurations are illustrated in the following diagram (the remainder of the molecule is represented by R, and the electron pair is colored yellow). If these configurations were stable, there would be four additional stereoisomers of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. However, pyramidal nitrogen is normally not configurationally stable. It rapidly inverts its configuration (equilibrium arrows) by passing through a planar, sp^2 -hybridized transition state, leading to a mixture of interconverting R and S configurations. If the nitrogen atom were the only chiral center in the molecule, a 50:50 (racemic) mixture of R and S configurations would exist at equilibrium. If other chiral centers are present, as in the ephedrin isomers, a mixture of diastereomers will result. The take-home message is that nitrogen does not contribute to isolable stereoisomers.

Contributors

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