

17.5: Polyamides and Polyesters

Learning Objectives

- Describe how polyamides and polyesters are formed.

Animal intestines and silk were used for all guitar strings for centuries, until modern technology and changes in musical taste brought about significant changes. There are two major types of guitar strings in use today. Steel strings (first developed around 1900) are found on acoustic and electric guitars. They have a bright, crisp sound that lends itself well to diverse music such as jazz, rock 'n' roll, and bluegrass. Nylon strings are a more recent development. During World War II, the silk and animal products needed to manufacture steel guitar strings were not available. Nylon quickly proved to be a more-than-adequate substitute. Now nylon strings are found on all classical guitars. Their sound is somewhat softer than the steel strings, making the tone quality well-suited for the classical genre of music.

Polymerization - Condensation Polymers

A condensation polymer is a polymer formed by condensation reactions. Monomers of condensation polymers must contain two functional groups so that each monomer can link up with two other monomers. One type of condensation polymer is called a polyamide.

One pair of monomers that can form a *polyamide* is that of adipic acid and hexanediamine. Adipic acid is a carboxylic acid with two carboxyl groups on either end of the molecule. Hexanediamine has amino groups on either end of a six-carbon chain. When these molecules react with each other, a molecule of water is eliminated, classifying it as a condensation reaction (see figure below).

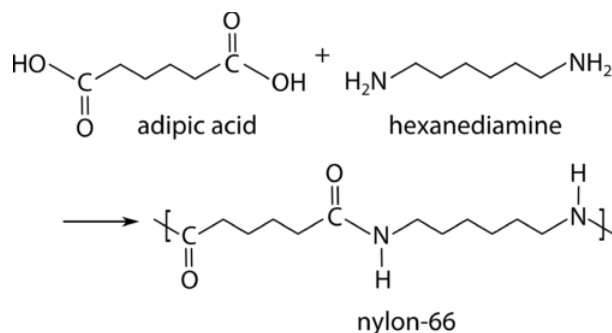


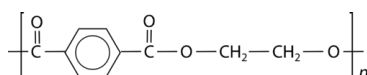
Figure 17.5.2: Nylon synthesis.

The polymer that results from the repetition of the condensation reaction is a polyamide called nylon-66. Nylon-66 was first invented in 1935 and has been used in all sorts of products. Polyamides, including Nylon-66, are commonly found in fibers and clothing, cooking utensils, fishing line, and carpeting—among many other applications.



Figure 17.5.3: Nylon spatula.

Polyester is another common type of condensation polymer. Recall that esters are formed from the reaction of an alcohol with a carboxylic acid. When both the acid and alcohol have two functional groups, the ester is capable of being polymerized. One such polyester is called polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and is formed from the reaction of ethylene glycol with terephthalic acid. The structure of PET is shown below.



PET is used in tires, photographic film, food packaging, and clothing. Polyester fabric is used in permanent-press clothing. Its resistance to wrinkling comes from the cross-linking of the polymer strands.

Summary

- A condensation polymer is a polymer formed by condensation reactions.
- Polyamides and polyesters are common types of condensation polymers.

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