

7.1: Energy and Chemical Bonds

Learning Objectives

- Define energy and distinguish the different types of energy, potential and kinetic.

Chemical changes and their accompanying changes in *energy* are important parts of our everyday world (Figure 7.1.1). The macronutrients in food (proteins, fats, and carbohydrates) undergo metabolic reactions that provide the energy to keep our bodies functioning. We burn a variety of fuels (gasoline, natural gas, coal) to produce energy for transportation, heating, and the generation of electricity. Industrial chemical reactions use enormous amounts of energy to produce raw materials (such as iron and aluminum). Energy is then used to manufacture those raw materials into useful products, such as cars, skyscrapers, and bridges.



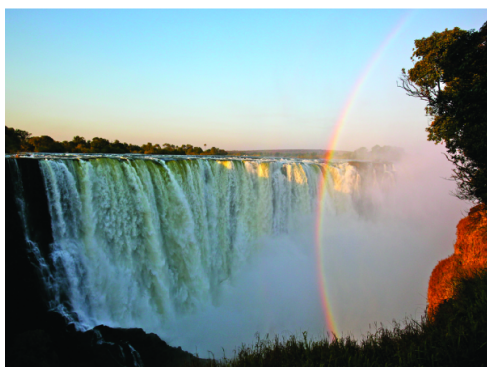
Figure 7.1.1: The energy involved in chemical changes is important to our daily lives: (a) A cheeseburger for lunch provides the energy you need to get through the rest of the day; (b) the combustion of gasoline provides the energy that moves your car (and you) between home, work, and school; and (c) coke, a processed form of coal, provides the energy needed to convert iron ore into iron, which is essential for making many of the products we use daily. (credit a: modification of work by “Pink Sherbet Photography”/Flickr; credit b: modification of work by Jeffery Turner).

Over 90% of the energy we use comes originally from the sun. Every day, the sun provides the earth with almost 10,000 times the amount of energy necessary to meet all of the world’s energy needs for that day. Our challenge is to find ways to convert and store incoming solar energy so that it can be used in reactions or chemical processes that are both convenient and nonpolluting. Plants and many bacteria capture solar energy through photosynthesis. We release the energy stored in plants when we burn wood or plant products such as ethanol. We also use this energy to fuel our bodies by eating food that comes directly from plants or from animals that got their energy by eating plants. Burning coal and petroleum also releases stored solar energy: These fuels are fossilized plant and animal matter.

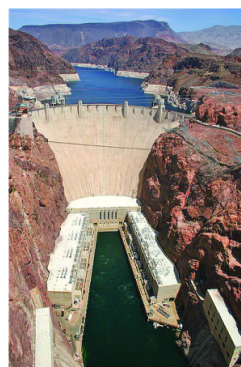
Energy

Energy can be defined as the capacity to supply heat or do work. One type of work (w) is the process of causing matter to move against an opposing force. For example, we do work when we inflate a bicycle tire—we move matter (the air in the pump) against the opposing force of the air surrounding the tire.

Like matter, energy comes in different types. One scheme classifies energy into two types: **potential energy**, the energy an object has because of its relative position, composition, or condition, often referred to as *stored energy*, and **kinetic energy**, the energy that an object possesses because of its motion. Water at the top of a waterfall or dam has potential energy because of its position; when it flows downward through generators, it has kinetic energy that can be used to do work and produce electricity in a hydroelectric plant (Figure 7.1.2). A battery has potential energy because the chemicals within it can produce electricity that can do work.



(a)



(b)

Figure 7.1.2: (a) Water that is higher in elevation, for example, at the top of Victoria Falls, has a higher potential energy than water at a lower elevation. As the water falls, some of its potential energy is converted into kinetic energy. (b) If the water flows through generators at the bottom of a dam, such as the Hoover Dam shown here, its kinetic energy is converted into electrical energy. (credit a: modification of work by Steve Jurvetson; credit b: modification of work by “curimedia”/Wikimedia commons).

Energy can be converted from one form into another, but all of the energy present before a change occurs always exists in some form after the change is completed. This observation is expressed in the law of conservation of energy: during a chemical or physical change, energy can be neither created nor destroyed, although it can be changed in form. (This is also one version of the first law of thermodynamics, as you will learn later.)

When one substance is converted into another, there is always an associated conversion of one form of energy into another. **Heat** is usually released or absorbed, but sometimes the conversion involves light, electrical energy, or some other form of energy. For example, chemical energy (a type of potential energy) is stored in the molecules that compose gasoline. When gasoline is combusted within the cylinders of a car’s engine, the rapidly expanding gaseous products of this chemical reaction generate mechanical energy (a type of kinetic energy) when they move the cylinders’ pistons.

According to the law of conservation of matter (seen in an earlier chapter), there is no detectable change in the total amount of matter during a chemical change. When chemical reactions occur, the energy changes are relatively modest and the mass changes are too small to measure, so the laws of conservation of matter and energy hold well. However, in nuclear reactions, the energy changes are much larger (by factors of a million or so), the mass changes are measurable, and matter-energy conversions are significant. This will be examined in more detail in a later chapter on nuclear chemistry. To encompass both chemical and nuclear changes, we combine these laws into one statement: The total quantity of matter and energy in the universe is fixed.

7.1: Energy and Chemical Bonds is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- 5.2: Energy Basics by OpenStax is licensed [CC BY 4.0](#). Original source: <https://openstax.org/details/books/chemistry-2e>.