

TRANSPORTERS

Overview: The majority of biological solutes are charged organic or inorganic molecules. Cellular membranes are hydrophobic and, therefore, effective barriers to separate them allowing the formation of gradients, which can be exploited, for example, in the generation of energy. Membrane transporters carry solutes across cell membranes, which would otherwise be impermeable to them. The energy required for active transport processes is obtained from ATP turnover or by exploiting ion gradients.

ATP-driven transporters can be divided into three major classes: P-type ATPases; F-type or V-type ATPases and ATP-binding cassette transporters. The first of these, P-type ATPases, are multimeric proteins, which transport (primarily) inorganic cations. The second, F-type or V-type ATPases, are proton-coupled motors, which can function either as transporters or as motors. Last, are ATP-binding cassette transporters, heavily involved in drug disposition as well as transporting endogenous solutes.

The second largest family of membrane proteins in the human genome, after the G protein-coupled receptors, are the SLC solute carrier family. Within the solute carrier family, there are not only a great variety of solutes transported, from simple inorganic ions to amino acids and sugars to relatively complex organic molecules like haem. The solute carrier family includes 48 families of almost 400 members, many of whom remain orphan transporters, in as much as a physiological function has yet to be determined. The SLC transporters include members which function as antiports, where solute movement in one direction is balanced by a solute moving in the reverse direction. Symports allow concentration gradients of one solute to allow movement of a second solute across a membrane. A third, relatively small group are equilibrative transporters, which allow solutes to travel across membranes down their concentration gradients. A more complex family of transporters, the SLC27 fatty acid transporters also express enzymatic function. Many of the transporters also express electrogenic properties of ion channels.

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