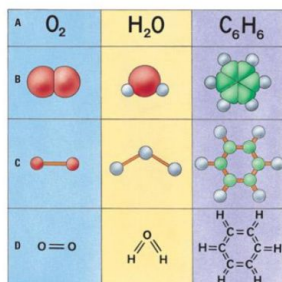


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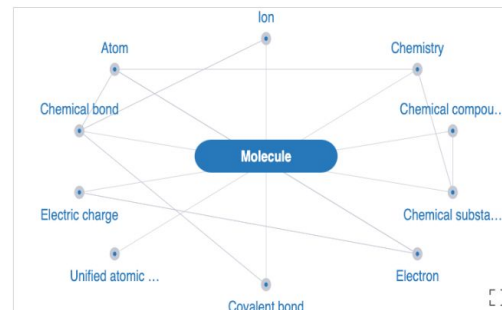
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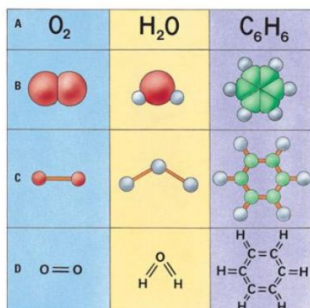
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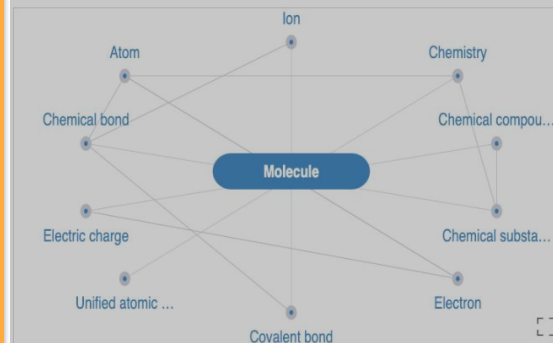
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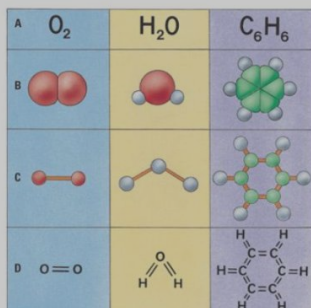
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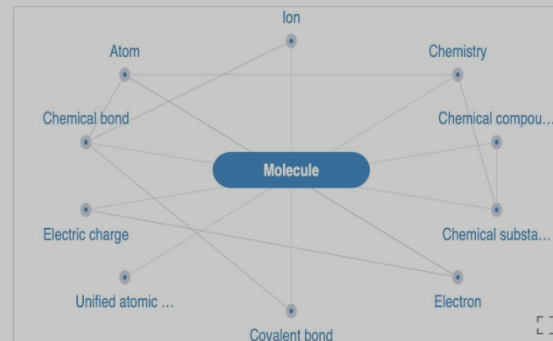
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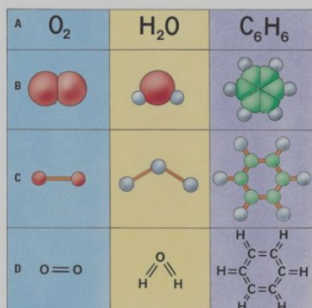
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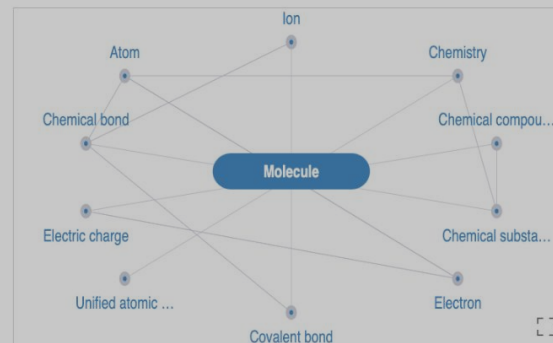
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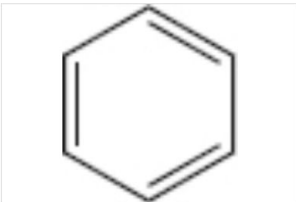
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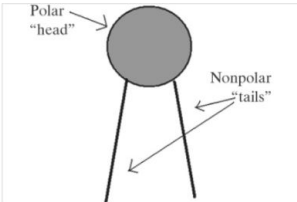
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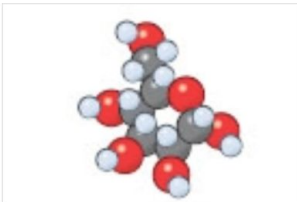
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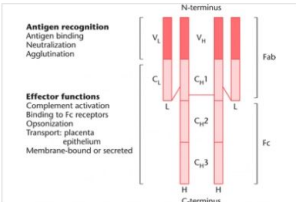
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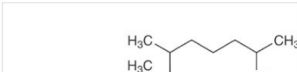


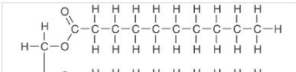
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β chains
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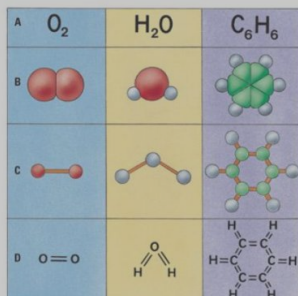


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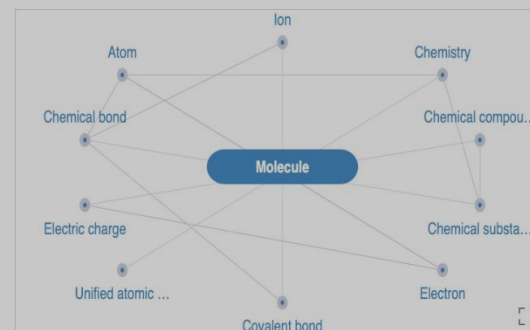
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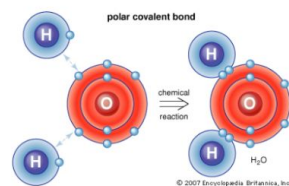
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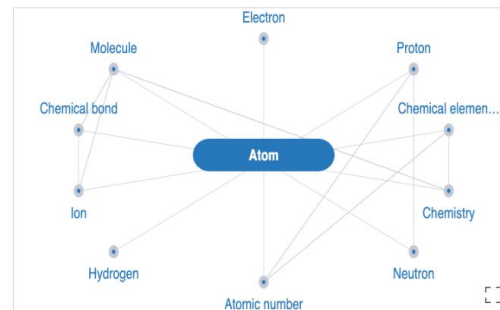
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The smallest unit of a chemical element. An atom consists of a dense central nucleus composed of protons and neutrons, surrounded by a cloud of rapidly orbiting electrons. All atoms of an element have the same number of protons in their nuclei, and each element has a different number; for example, every helium atom has two protons, and every carbon atom has six protons. In electrically neutral atoms, the number of electrons is the same as the number of protons. In a chemical reaction, an atom may lose, gain, or share electrons, but the nucleus remains unchanged. In a nuclear reaction, the number of protons or neutrons in the nucleus may change. See Note at [subatomic particle](#). See *A Closer Look*.

Atoms

Every atom consists of a nucleus containing protons and (except in the case of hydrogen) neutrons, with rapidly moving electrons surrounding it. The electrons occupy regions called shells that have different energy levels. Hydrogen (the lightest element) consists of one proton, located in the nucleus, and one electron, which moves around the nucleus in an electron shell.

Hydrogen

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