ENZYMES OF DIGESTION

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Summary

The enzymes of digestion are produced and secreted from almost all parts of the digestive system: salivary glands, lingual glands, stomach, pancreas, liver and intestinal mucosa. Often the final steps of digestion take place in the villi of enterocytes. These enzymes are almost all hydrolases. The digestion of carbohydrates begins in mouth by the salivary amylase and continues in the small intestine by pancreatic amylase and the intestinal and mucosal oligo- and disaccharidases. The enzymes involved in fat
digestion are the lingual, gastric, pancreatic and intestinal lipases. However, the main digestion of fats occurs in the small intestine by pancreatic lipase with the contribution of bile acids. The digestion of proteins begins in the stomach by pepsins, the active form of pepsinogens which is secreted from the chief cells of the gastric glands. The proteolytic enzymes of the pancreas, i.e. trypsin, chymotrypsin and carboxypolipeptidase, which are also secreted in inactive forms, continue protein digestion. The end products of protein digestion are amino acids, produced by the action of intestinal and mucosal dipeptidases.

1. Introduction

Preparation of foods contributes to their digestibility. Foods contain several autolytic enzymes. Many foods are fermented i.e. bacterial enzymes contribute to the digestibility of their components. Cooking denatures proteins, breaks cell walls, etc. and again the digestibility is promoted.

Almost all the enzymes of digestion are hydrolases. They are secreted by the salivary glands and gastric glands, pancreas and liver and the intestinal enterocytes. The actions of the digestive enzymes are similar to those of the lysosomal enzymes of the cells, except that they have different pH optima. Lysosomal enzymes are mostly active at acidic pH, whereas the digestive enzymes except pepsins have their activity optima at a pH of 6.5 to 7.5.

Many of the digestive enzymes have trivial names, such as pepsin and trypsin, since they were the first enzymes to be discovered before the systematic nomenclature was developed.

Although the basic principles of digestion are the same in most species we humans are interested, there are still significant differences between e.g. herbivoric and omnivoric species compared with predators, which have much shorter guts (see also Alimentary Systems in Some Homeothermic Vertebrates).

2. Hydrolysis

If an organic molecule is split by addition of water, the reaction is called hydrolysis. Three major types of food, carbohydrates, lipids and proteins, are all digested by hydrolysis, but the enzymes catalyzing the reactions are different in each case.

Almost all the carbohydrates of the human diet are large polysaccharides or disaccharides, and they are combinations of monosaccharides bound to one another by condensation. The first stage of this reaction is the removal of a hydrogen ion from a monosaccharide and then a hydroxyl ion from another one. The two monosaccharides are then combined with each other at the sites of removal, and the hydrogen and hydroxyl ions combine to form water. When the carbohydrates are digested back into monosaccharides, specific enzymes return the hydrogen and hydroxyl ions to the polysaccharides and thereby separate the monosaccharides from each other.
The majority of fats in the diet consist of triglycerides (neutral fats), which are combinations of three fatty acid molecules condensed with a single glycerol molecule. Phospholipids consist of a phosphate and two fatty acid molecules. Cholesterol esters consist of a cholesterol and one fatty acid molecule. In the digestion of triglycerides, the fat-digesting enzymes return water to the triglyceride molecule, thereby splitting the fatty acid molecules away from the glycerol.

Finally, proteins are composed of amino acids bound together by peptide linkages. In this linkage, a hydroxyl ion is removed from one amino acid and a hydrogen ion is removed from the next one in condensation. In their digestion, the proteolytic enzymes return water to the peptide bonds to release the constituent amino acids.

3. Enzymes of Digestion According to their Sites of Secretion

Table 1 listed the sources, activators, substrates, actions and end products of the enzymes of digestion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Enzyme</th>
<th>Activator</th>
<th>Substrat</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salivary glands</td>
<td>Salivary α-amylase (ptyalin)</td>
<td>Cl</td>
<td>Starch</td>
<td>Hydrolizes 1-4α linkages</td>
<td>α-Limit dextrins, maltorise, and maltose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingual glands</td>
<td>Lingual lipase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Triglycerides</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fatty acids and 1,2-diacylglycerols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>Pepsins (pepsinogens)</td>
<td>HCl</td>
<td>Proteins and polypeptides</td>
<td>Cleave peptide bonds adjacent to aromatic amino acids</td>
<td>Proteoses, peptons and polypeptides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stomach lipase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Triglycerides</td>
<td>Lipolysis</td>
<td>Fatty acids and glycerol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancreas</td>
<td>Endopeptidases Trypsin (Trypsinogen)</td>
<td>Enterokinase and trypsin</td>
<td>Proteins and polypeptides</td>
<td>Cleave peptide bonds adjacent to arginine or lysine</td>
<td>Polypeptides and amino acids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chymotrypsins (chymotrypsinogens)</td>
<td>Trypsin</td>
<td>Proteins and polypeptides</td>
<td>Cleave peptide bonds adjacent to arginine or lysine</td>
<td>Polypeptides and amino acids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elastase (proelastase)</td>
<td>Trypsin</td>
<td>Elastin, some other proteins</td>
<td>Cleave peptide bonds adjacent to aliphatic amino acids</td>
<td>Polypeptides and amino acids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carboxypeptidase A (procarboxypeptidase A)</td>
<td>Trypsin</td>
<td>Proteins and polypeptides</td>
<td>Cleave carboxy-terminal amino acids that have aromatic or branched</td>
<td>Polypeptides and amino acids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enzyme Name</td>
<td>Activator</td>
<td>Substrate</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>End Products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Carboxypeptidase B</td>
<td>Trypsin</td>
<td>Proteins and polypeptides</td>
<td>Cleaves carboxy-terminal amino acids that have basic side chains</td>
<td>Polypeptides and amino acids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colipase (procolipase)</td>
<td>Trypsin</td>
<td>Fat droplets</td>
<td>Facilitates exposure of active site of pancreatic lipase</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pancreatic lipase</td>
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<td>Triglycerides</td>
<td>Lipolysis</td>
<td>Monoglycerides and fatty acids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cholesteryl ester hydrolase</td>
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<td>Cholesteryl esters</td>
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<td>Cholesterol and fatty acids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pancreatic α-amylase</td>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Starch</td>
<td>Hydrolyzes 1:4α linkages</td>
<td>α-Limit dextrins, maltotriose, and maltose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribonuclease</td>
<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deoxyribonuclease</td>
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<td>Nucleotides</td>
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<td>Phospholipase A2 (proporphospholipase A2)</td>
<td>Trypsin</td>
<td>Phospholipids</td>
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<td>Fatty acids, lysophospholipids</td>
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<td>Intestinal mucosa</td>
<td>Dipeptidase</td>
<td>Dipeptides</td>
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<td>Amino acids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maltase</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>Maltose, maltotriose</td>
<td></td>
<td>Glucose</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lactase</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>Lactose</td>
<td></td>
<td>Galactose and glucose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sucrase</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>Sucrose</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fructose and glucose</td>
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<tr>
<td>α-Limited dextrinase</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>A-Limit dextrins</td>
<td></td>
<td>Glucose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclease and related enzymes</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>Nucleic acids</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pentoses and purine and pyrimidine bases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cytoplasm of mucosal cells</td>
<td>Various peptidases</td>
<td>Di, tri, and tetrapeptides</td>
<td></td>
<td>Amino acids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The sources, activators, substrates, actions and end products of the enzymes of digestion.

3.1. Ptyalin (α-amylase)

The only enzyme having physiological significance in saliva is ptyalin (α-amylase). It is secreted mainly by the parotid glands. Ptyalin starts the digestion of carbohydrates such as plant starch and muscle glycogen. Starch is our main source of energy. Salivary amylase can hydrolyze starch into the disaccharide maltose and other small polymers of glucose such as maltotriose and α-limit dextrins that originate from the branch points of the starch molecule. However, because ptyalin can only act on the food for a short period, oral digestion has limited significance. Carbohydrate digestion continues in stomach for a while. Explanation for the continuation of ptyalin action is slow penetration of hydrochloric acid into the swallowed bolus. The optimal pH of salivary
amylase is 6.7. When a food bolus enters the stomach, its action is inhibited by the acidic gastric juice, which has a pH of 4.0 or less. The salivary α-amylase hydrolyzes 1:4α linkages but not 1:6α linkages—terminal 1:4α linkages, and the 1:4α linkages next to branching points.

Probably, not more than 5% of all the starches that are ingested become hydrolyzed within the mouth before the food is swallowed. Starch digestion by ptyalin continues in the corpus and fundus of the stomach for as long as an hour, and, therefore, as much as 30 to 40% of the starch may be hydrolyzed mainly to maltose before the food becomes mixed with the acidic gastric juice.

3.2. Lingual Lipase

The serous lingual glands (Ebner’s glands), on the dorsal surface of the tongue, secrete lingual lipase. As much as 30% of dietary triglyceride is digested in the stomach by the actions of lingual and gastric lipases together, producing fatty acids and 1,2-diacylglycerols. Lingual lipase appears to have little practical importance in lipid digestion. On the other hand, in premature infants in whom pancreatic lipase is insufficiently secreted or in children with congenital deficiency of pancreatic lipase, about half of dietary triacylglycerols can be digested and, therefore, absorbed, presumably due to the action of these lipases.

Bibliography


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Holden C. and Mace R. (1997). *Human Biology*, vol. 69, 605-628. Phylogenetic analysis of the evolution of lactose digestion in adults. [High lactose digestion capacity in adults is common only in populations of European and circum-Mediterranean origin and is thought to be an evolutionary adaptation to millennia of drinking milk from domestic livestock.]


2. - Muscle metabolism and function.

3. - Ergonomics.

He has contributed 266 papers in refereed journals and seventy-two in proceedings, and written fifty-five reviews, and thirty books or book chapters. He serves on the editorial board of four international journals and is at present the European Journal Editor of Pathophysiology.

Of his post-graduate students (thirty-two in biotransformation, twenty-seven in muscle metabolism and physiology, and five others), twelve serve as professors in China, Finland, Greece, Sweden, and the United States.