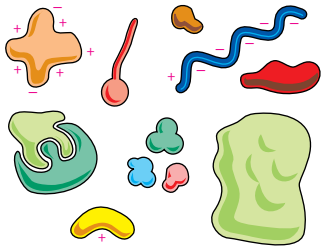


Protein Separation - Part 1

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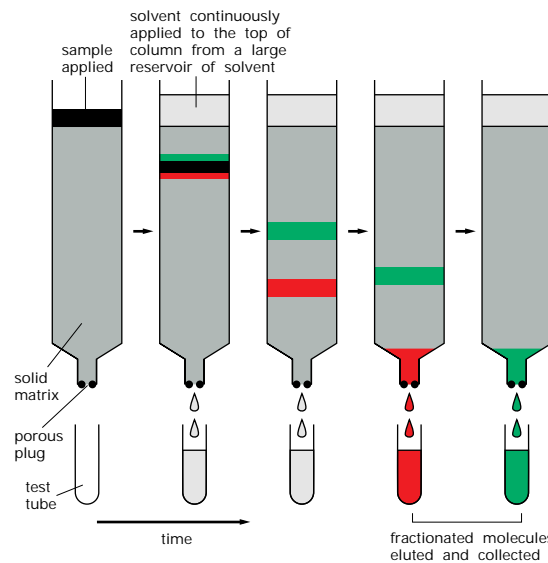
PROTEIN SEPARATION



Proteins are very diverse. They differ by size, shape, charge, hydrophobicity, and their affinity for other molecules. All these properties can be exploited to separate them from one another so that they can be studied individually.

COLUMN CHROMATOGRAPHY

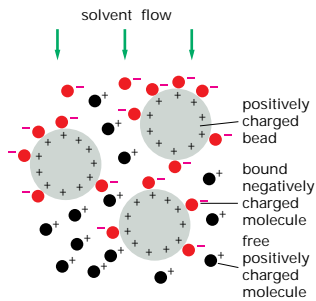
Proteins are often fractionated by **column chromatography**. A mixture of proteins in solution is applied to the top of a cylindrical column with a permeable solid matrix immersed in solvent. A large amount of solvent is then put through the column. Because different proteins are retarded to different extents by their interaction with the matrix, they can be collected separately as they flow out the bottom. According to the choice of matrix, proteins can be separated according to their charge, their hydrophobicity, their size, or their ability to bind to particular chemical groups (see below).



THREE KINDS OF CHROMATOGRAPHY

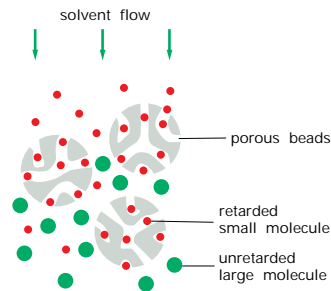
Many types of matrix are available for column chromatography, usually packed in the column in the form of small beads. A typical protein purification strategy might employ in turn each of the three kinds of matrix described below, with a final protein purification of up to 10,000-fold.

Purity can easily be assessed by gel electrophoresis (see opposite page).



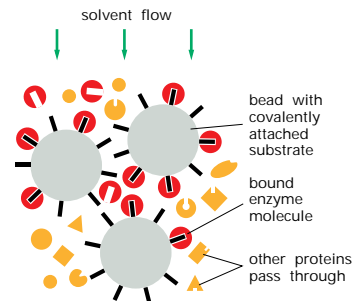
(A) ION-EXCHANGE CHROMATOGRAPHY

Ion-exchange columns are packed with small beads that carry positive or negative charges that retard proteins of the opposite charge. The association between a protein and the matrix depends on the pH and ionic strength of the solution passing down the column. These can be varied in a controlled way to achieve an effective separation.



(B) GEL-FILTRATION CHROMATOGRAPHY

Gel-filtration columns separate proteins according to their size. The matrix consists of tiny porous beads. Protein molecules that are small enough to enter the holes in the beads are delayed and travel more slowly through the column. Proteins that cannot enter the beads are washed out of the column first. Such columns also allow an estimate of protein size.



(C) AFFINITY CHROMATOGRAPHY

Affinity columns contain a matrix covalently coupled to a molecule that interacts specifically with the protein of interest (e.g., an antibody, or an enzyme substrate). Proteins that bind specifically to such a column can finally be released by a pH change or by concentrated salt solutions, and they emerge highly purified.