

MICROBIAL PHYSIOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

Albert G. Moss

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Preface

During the eight- to ten-year span between the writing of the first edition of this text and the present, tremendous strides have been made in the field of microbial physiology. As a result, all of the original chapters have undergone a thorough rewriting and additional chapters have been added to accommodate the many advances in the field. In an effort to provide a more readable text, reference citations have been omitted. However, a variety of recent reviews and journal articles are provided at the end of each chapter.

Microbial genetics has developed so rapidly that many individuals in the field no longer consider it a part of microbial physiology, but a field unto itself. However, advances in our knowledge of the various facets of cell structure and intermediary metabolism have been furthered so tremendously by the application of the techniques and principles of genetics that it is impossible to undertake a discussion of microbial physiology without providing considerable background in genetics.

The authors would like to thank all of those who have provided them with help and encouragement in writing this text. We are especially grateful to the many authors who provided original materials and to Dr. Nyles Charon for reading a portion of the manuscript during the preparative stages.

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January 1988*

Contents

Chapter 1

SCOPE OF MICROBIAL PHYSIOLOGY

1

Cell Structure / 1	
Nucleus / 1	
Cell Surfaces of Microorganisms / 4	
Capsules / 7	
Organs of Locomotion / 8	
Pili or Fimbriae / 9	
Mitochondria / 10	
Ribosomes / 12	
Spores / 13	
Endospores of Bacteria / 13	
Growth / 14	
Growth Cycle / 14	
Factors Affecting Growth / 16	
Nutrition / 16	
Oxygen / 19	
Carbon Dioxide / 20	
Temperature / 21	
Hydrogen Ion Concentration / 21	
Carbohydrate Metabolism and Energy Production / 22	
Fermentation or Glycolysis / 24	
Alternative Pathways for Carbohydrate Utilization / 27	
Tricarboxylic Acid Cycle and Oxidative Phosphorylation / 29	
Metabolism of Nitrogenous Compounds / 30	
Ammonia Assimilation / 33	
General Reactions of Amino Acids / 34	
Biosynthesis of Amino Acids / 35	
Glutamate or α -Ketoglutarate Family / 35	

Pyruvate Family / 35	
Aspartate Family / 35	
Serine–Glycine or Triose Family / 37	
Aromatic Amino Acid Pathways / 37	
Purine Biosynthesis / 38	
Pyrimidine Biosynthesis / 39	
Synthesis of DNA, RNA, and Protein / 40	
Metabolic and Genetic Regulation / 42	
Microbial Genetics / 44	
Methods for the Selection of Mutants / 45	
Direct Selection Method for Resistant Mutants / 45	
Penicillin Selection Technique / 46	
Replica-Plating Technique / 46	
Other Techniques for Mutant Selection / 48	
Conditional Lethality: Its Use in Mutant Selection / 49	
Transfer of Genetic Information in Procaryotes / 49	
Summary / 50	

Chapter 2

SUBCELLULAR STRUCTURE OF MICROORGANISMS

52

Nucleus / 52	
Cell Surface of Microorganisms / 60	
Cell-Wall Synthesis / 65	
Outer Membrane of Gram-Negative Bacteria / 71	
Cytoplasmic Membrane and Other Membranous Structures / 78	
Cytoplasmic Membrane / 78	
Transport / 79	
Phosphoenolpyruvate-Dependent Phosphotransferase System / 81	
Iron Transport / 83	
Phosphate Transport / 84	
Mesosomes / 85	
Other Membranous Organelles / 85	
Capsules / 86	
Organs of Locomotion / 92	
Cilia and Flagella of Eucaryotes / 93	
Bacterial Flagella / 94	
Swarming Phenomenon / 99	
Motility in Spirochetes / 100	
Ameboid Movement / 102	
Gliding Movement / 102	

Other External Structures /	105
Pili or Fimbriae /	105
Mitochondria /	107
Ribosomes /	108
References /	111

Chapter 3

CARBOHYDRATE METABOLISM AND ENERGY PRODUCTION 118

Glycolytic Pathways /	119
Fructose Bisphosphate Aldolase (Embden–Meyerhof–Parnas) Pathway /	119
Hexose Monophosphate Pathways /	121
Metabolic Regulation of Catabolic Pathways /	127
Gluconeogenesis /	128
Tricarboxylic Acid Cycle /	131
Glyoxylate Cycle /	136
Energy Production /	139
Substrate Level Phosphorylation /	139
Electron Transport and The Terminal Respiratory Pathways /	142
Oxidative Phosphorylation /	146
Pathways for Utilization of Sugars Other Than Glucose /	149
Pectin Degradation and Aldohexuronate Pathways /	157
Cellulose Degradation /	159
Starch and Glycogen Hydrolysis /	163
Metabolism of Aromatic Compounds /	166
Fermentation Pathways in Specific Groups of Microorganisms /	170
Fermentation Balances /	170
Yeast Fermentation /	173
Lactic Acid Producing Fermentations /	175
Butyric Acid and Solvent-Producing Fermentations /	182
Fermentations of the Mixed-Acid Type /	190
Propionic Acid Fermentation /	193
Characteristics and Metabolism of Autotrophs /	197
Major Groups of Autotrophs /	197
Photosynthetic Bacteria and Cyanobacteria /	199
Autotrophic CO ₂ Fixation and Mechanisms of Photosynthesis /	200
Hydrogen Bacteria /	205
Nitrifying Bacteria /	205
Sulfur Bacteria /	206

x CONTENTS

Iron Bacteria /	207
Methylootrophs /	207
Methanogens /	209
References /	209

Chapter 4

LIPIDS AND STEROLS

221

Lipid Composition of Microorganisms /	221
Saturated, Straight-Chain Fatty Acids /	225
Branched-Chain Fatty Acids /	226
Unsaturated Fatty Acids /	227
Ring-Containing Fatty Acids /	227
Alk-1-enyl Ethers /	228
Alkyl Ethers /	229
Microbial Lipids /	229
Glycolipids /	231
Biosynthesis of Fatty Acids /	233
Role of Cofactors in Fatty Acid Biosynthesis /	237
Biosynthesis of Phospholipids /	238
Degradation of Lipids /	239
Pathway to the Biosynthesis of Mevalonate, Squalene, and Sterols /	241
References /	246

Chapter 5

NITROGEN METABOLISM

251

Biological Nitrogen Fixation /	252
The Nitrogen-Fixation Process /	255
Inorganic Nitrogen Metabolism /	263
Assimilation of Inorganic Nitrogen /	266
General Reactions of Amino Acids /	270
Amino Acid Decarboxylases /	271
Amino Acid Deaminases /	272
Amino Acid Transaminases (Aminotransferases) /	275
Amino Acid Racemases /	276
Role of Pyridoxal 5'-Phosphate in Enzymatic Reactions with Amino Acids /	277
The Stickland Reaction /	279
References /	280

Chapter 6**AMINO ACIDS, PURINES, AND PYRIMIDINES****284**

- Amino Acid Biosynthesis / 284
 - The Glutamate or α -Ketoglutarate Family / 284
 - The Aspartate and Pyruvate Families / 293
 - The Serine–Glycine Family / 301
 - The Aromatic Amino Acids / 304
- Purines and Pyrimidines / 321
 - Biosynthesis of Purines / 323
 - Biosynthesis of Pyrimidines / 324
 - Regulation of Purine and Pyrimidine Biosynthesis / 327
 - Interconversion of Nucleotides, Nucleosides,
and Free Bases / 328
- References / 330

Chapter 7**DNA, RNA, Protein Synthesis****334**

- Structure of DNA / 335
 - Bacterial Nucleoid / 337
- DNA Replication / 341
- Initiation of DNA Replication / 348
 - RNA Synthesis—Transcription / 350
- Protein Synthesis—Translation / 360
 - Transfer RNA / 362
 - Charging of tRNA / 365
 - Ribosome Structure / 367
 - Initiation of Polypeptide Synthesis / 367
 - Elongation / 369
 - Peptide Bond Formation / 371
 - Translocation / 372
 - Termination / 373
 - Ribosome Editing / 374
- Protein Export / 374
 - Degradation of Abnormal Proteins / 376
- Antibiotics That Affect Nucleic Acid and Protein
Synthesis / 378
 - Agents Affecting DNA Metabolism / 378
 - Agents Affecting Transcription / 381
 - Agents Affecting Translation / 382
- Summary / 390
- Selected References / 390

Chapter 8

**TRANSFER OF GENETIC INFORMATION, RECOMBINATION,
TRANSPOSABLE ELEMENTS, MUTAGENESIS, DNA REPAIR
SYSTEMS**

393

Transfer of Genetic Information /	394
Transformation /	394
Conjugation /	402
Transduction /	415
Recombination /	420
General Recombination /	420
Genetics of Recombination /	422
Mismatch Repair /	425
Transposable Elements /	425
Transposon <i>Tn10</i> /	428
Mutagenesis /	431
Spontaneous Mutations /	432
The Nature of Mutational Events /	432
Suppressor Mutations /	433
DNA Repair Systems /	436
Photoreactivation /	437
Excision Repair /	437
<i>uvrD</i> (Helicase II) /	438
Mismatch Repair /	438
DNA Glycosylases /	439
Adaptive Response to Methylating and Ethylating Agents /	441
Post-Replication Daughter Strand Gap Repair /	441
SOS-Inducible Repair /	442
Selected References /	445

Chapter 9

REGULATION OF PROCARYOTIC GENE EXPRESSION

447

Transcriptional Control /	447
The <i>lac</i> Operon /	448
Catabolite Control /	452
The <i>gal</i> Operon /	455
The <i>ara</i> Operon /	456
The <i>trp</i> Operon: Repression and Attenuation Controls /	457
The Arginine Regulon /	458
Membrane-Mediated Regulation /	463

Recombination Regulation of Gene Expression (phase variation) /	465
Translational Repression /	466
Global Control: Regulation at the Whole Cell Level /	466
The SOS Response /	471
Heat Shock Response /	471
Stringent Control /	473
Regulation of Nitrogen Assimilation and Nitrogen Fixation /	477
Phosphate-Starvation-Controlled Stimulon /	479
The <i>lon</i> System: Proteolytic Control /	482
Selected References /	482

Chapter 10

BACTERIOPHAGE

485

General Characteristics of Bacteriophage /	485
T4 Phage /	490
T4 Phage Structure /	490
Regulation of T4 Gene Expression /	500
λ Phage /	501
The Lysis–Lysogeny Decision /	501
Transcription /	501
Control of Integration and Excision /	505
λ Phage Replication /	507
Mu Phage /	509
ϕ X174 Phage /	515
Restriction and Modification /	518
Selected References /	522

Chapter 11

GROWTH AND ITS REGULATION

523

Growth of Gram-Positive Streptococci /	524
Growth of Gram-Negative Rods /	528
Growth of Gram-Positive Bacilli /	532
Effect of Variations in the Cultural Environment on Microbial Growth /	537
Water /	537
Osmotic Pressure and Osmoregulation /	539
Hydrogen Ion Concentration /	542
Temperature /	544

xiv CONTENTS

Effect of the Toxic Environment on Microbial Growth /	547
Physical Agents /	548
Morphogenesis—Development of Dormant or Resting Forms /	562
Cytological Aspects of Endospore Formation /	563
Physiological Aspects of Sporulation /	565
Genetic Loci That Can Result in Sporulation-Defective Mutants /	567
Activation, Germination, and Outgrowth of Bacterial Endospores /	569
Selected References /	573

INDEX

579

Scope of Microbial Physiology

Physiology is the study of the structure and functions of living organisms and their components. At the cellular level, a broad definition will encompass cell structure, metabolism, genetics, and growth. To provide the reader with a broad vista of the scope of this field, the first chapter is devoted to an overview of the major aspects of microbial physiology.

CELL STRUCTURE

Nucleus

Microorganisms range from extremely small, unicellular forms such as bacteria to larger forms such as protozoa, fungi, and algae. Lower forms may be distinguished from higher forms on the basis of the degree of intracellular organization. Bacteria are termed procaryotic because of their primitive nucleus. The procaryotic nucleus, sometimes referred to as a **nucleoid** to indicate its primitive form, is not bounded by a nuclear membrane. Higher forms are referred to as eucaryotic because their nucleus is clearly separated from the cytoplasm by a distinct membrane (Fig. 1-1). Eucaryotic organisms contain proteins called histones, ribonucleic acid (RNA), and nonhistone proteins in association with chromosomal DNA. Until relatively recently, it was thought that the procaryotic nucleoid was composed entirely of covalently closed (circular) DNA with no protein in association with it. More sophisticated techniques of separation of the nuclear material from the cell has made it possible to show that the procaryotic nucleoid contains histone-like proteins in association with the DNA.

A major distinction between procaryotic and eucaryotic cells is their mode of chromosome duplication (replication) and cell division. In eucaryotic cells, chromosome duplication is accomplished during an early stage of a

2 SCOPE OF MICROBIAL PHYSIOLOGY

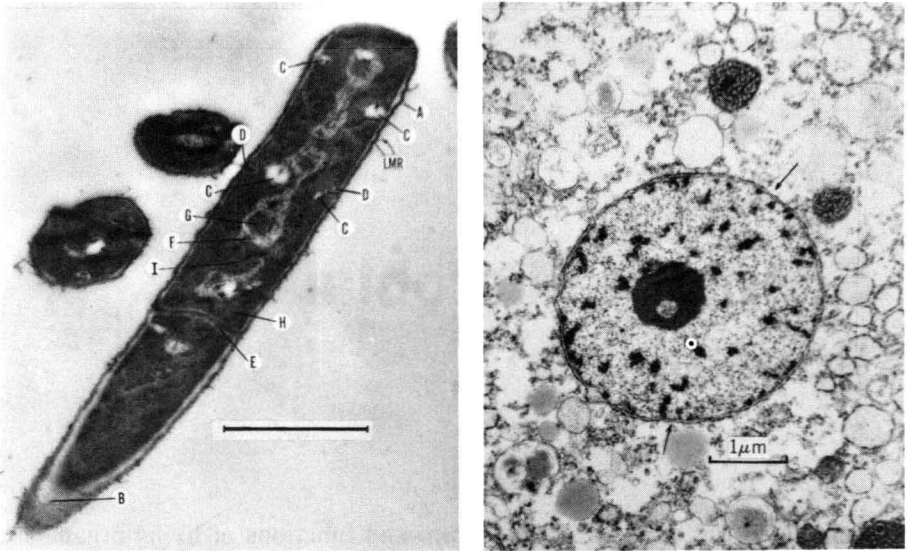


Fig. 1-1. Comparison of cellular structure of procaryotic and eucaryotic cells. (1) Electron micrograph of a longitudinal section of *Bacillus cereus*. (A) Cell wall, (B) oblique section of cell wall showing dense particles and the dense inner layer, (C) four peripheral bodies cut at different levels, (D) centripetally growing transverse cell wall, (E) completed transverse cell wall before thickening, (F) low-density fibrous component of nuclear apparatus, (G) dense body in nuclear apparatus that may be inclusion of cytoplasmic material, (H) small dense particles that appear to be main constituent of cytoplasm, (I) unidentified cytoplasmic inclusion. LMR, limit of resolution of light microscope. Bar equals 1.0 μm . From Chapman, G. B. and J. Hillier. 1953. *J. Bacteriol.* **66**:362. (2) Interphase nucleus of the myxomycete *Arcyria cinerea*. The typical nuclear envelope is interrupted by prominent pores at the arrows. The nucleolus near the center is well defined, while the chromatin is randomly dispersed throughout the nucleus. From Mims, C. W. 1972. *J. Gen. Microbiol.* **71**:53.

process known as mitosis. As mitosis continues, the duplicated chromosomes are separated and guided into new cells to provide an exact copy of the information present in the original DNA (Fig. 1-2).

Division of procaryotic cells takes place in a somewhat different manner. Many details regarding the molecular mechanism involved have not been revealed. However, it is known that the bacterial chromosome is attached to the cell surface at a site referred to as a replication site (Fig. 1-3). As the DNA of the chromosome is duplicated, the cell wall and cell membrane are extended in both directions so that the duplicated chromosomes become separated. Eventually, the duplicated chromosomes are separated from one another by the formation of a cross-wall or septum to produce two new cells. In this manner, each new procaryotic cell receives one copy of the information in the original DNA of the chromosome. Although the mechanism

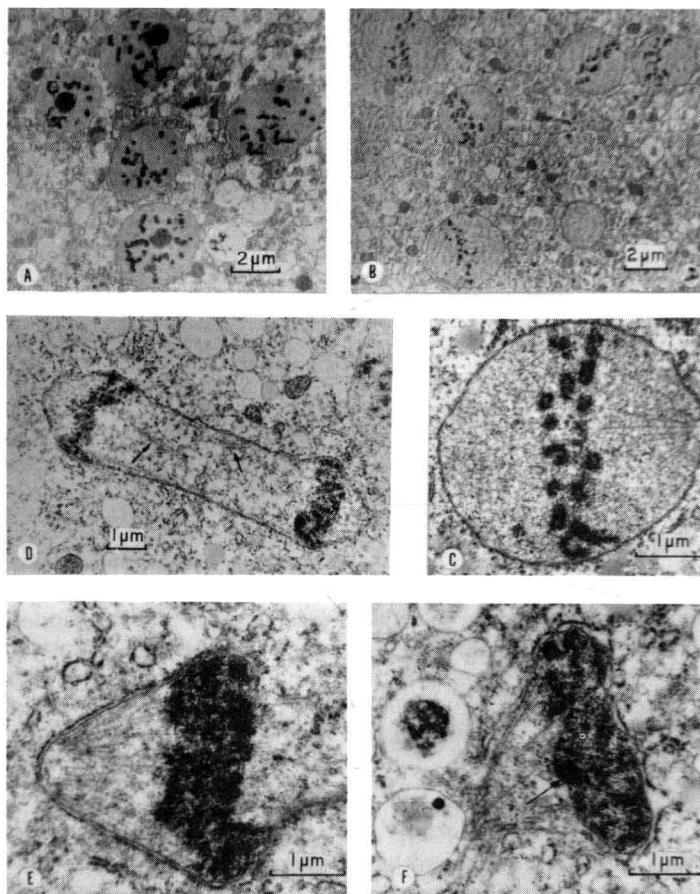


Fig. 1-2. Stages of mitosis in the myxomycete *Arcyria cinerea*. (A) **Prophase nuclei.** Chromatin has begun to condense into chromosomes. Nucleoli are still present. In the nucleus in the upper center, a portion of the spindle apparatus is just barely visible. (B) **Metaphase nuclei.** The nucleoli are no longer present. Division appears to be nearly synchronous. Nuclei are still spherical. (C) **Higher magnification of a portion of a metaphase nucleus** reveals the presence of spindle fibers that appear to terminate near the inner surface of the nuclear envelope. (D) **Telophase nucleus.** Although the nucleus is greatly elongated, the nuclear envelope persists. Interzonal spindle fibers are visible at the arrows. (E) **Portion of a telophase nucleus shortly after rupture of the nuclear envelope in the interzonal region.** Continuity of the nuclear envelope is still apparent in the polar region. Chromosomal spindle fibers are still visible. (F) **Young daughter nucleus** in which the nucleolus is just visible (arrow). From Mims, C. W. 1972. *J. Gen. Microbiol.* 71:53.

4 SCOPE OF MICROBIAL PHYSIOLOGY

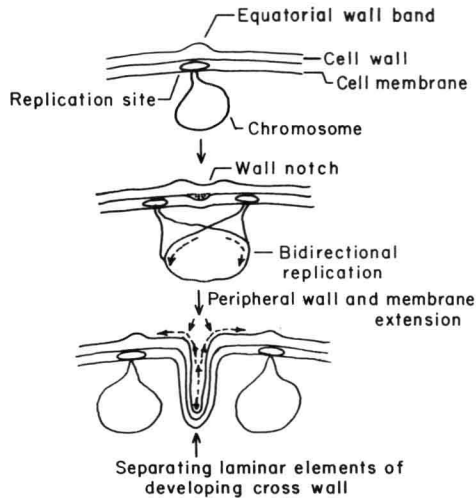


Fig. 1-3. Schematic diagram of the growth stages of a gram-positive bacterial cell. The bacterial chromosome is attached to a replication site embedded in the cell membrane. As the cell wall and cell membrane are extended, a notch develops in the wall. Extension of the surface layers of the cell results in separation of the replication sites as bidirectional replication of the chromosome continues. When chromosomal replication is complete, peripheral extension of the wall and membrane layers continues, and the laminar elements of the developing cross-wall are separated.

of duplication differs considerably, both procaryotic and eucaryotic cells have a rather precise mechanism of transmitting the hereditary information coded in their DNA from one generation to the next.

Cell Surfaces of Microorganisms

Cell Walls. Most microorganisms, whether they are procaryotic or eucaryotic, have a rigid outer structure referred to as a cell wall. In some organisms the outer surface structure of the cell may be rather complex. The cellular contents are bounded by a membrane which, in electron micrographs, appears as a double track. The cytoplasmic membrane is surrounded by the cell wall. In bacteria or yeast, the protective outer wall of the cell can be weakened by treatment of a culture of cells with an antibiotic that specifically inhibits synthesis of a cell wall component or with an enzyme that cleaves chemical bonds holding these components together. As the cell wall is weakened, the cytoplasmic contents round up in a ball-like configuration known as a protoplast. Because protoplasts are more vulnerable to osmotic tension, removal of the wall material must be performed in a medium of sufficient osmolarity to prevent the cell membrane from breaking because of the internal turgor pressure (Fig. 1-4).

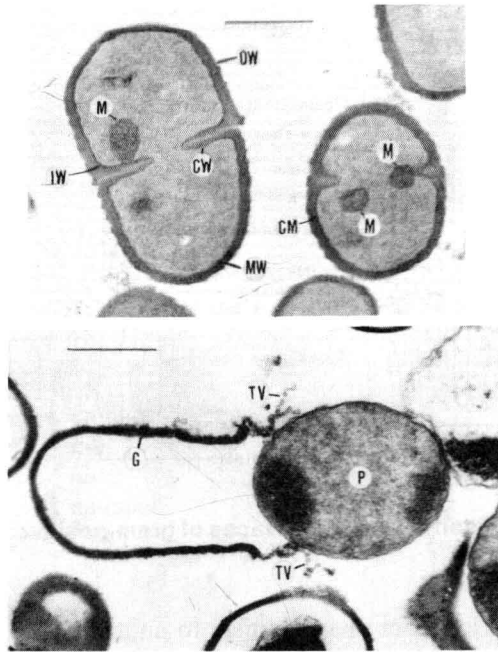


Fig. 1-4. Comparison of cells of *Lactobacillus casei* in the normal state and after treatment with EDTA followed by treatment with lysozyme in the presence of sucrose and 10 mM MgCl_2 . Normal cells (upper photograph) show a thick outer wall (OW) with a middle cell wall (MW) extending into the area of cross-wall formation (CW). The darkly staining inner wall (IW) is seen in the peripheral region but not in the septum. The cell membrane (CM) adheres to the wall and cross wall but extends into and surrounds the mesosome (M). The protoplast (P) in the lower photograph is still attached to the cell wall ghost (G) by tubular-vesicular elements (TV). Bar equals 500 nm. From Thorne, K. J. I. and D. C. Barker. 1972. *J. Gen. Microbiol.* **70**:87.

In 1884 the Danish investigator Christian Gram devised a differential stain based on the ability of certain bacterial cells to retain the dye crystal violet after decolorization with 95% ethanol. Those cells that retain the stain are called **gram-positive**. Those that are decolorized by 95% ethanol and are visible only when stained with a counterstain of contrasting color are referred to as **gram-negative**. Subsequent studies have shown that this fortuitous discovery has considerable significance in that it distinguishes two fundamentally different types of bacterial cells. The surface of gram-negative cells is much more complex than that of gram-positive cells. As shown in the schematic drawings in Fig. 1-5, the gram-positive cell surface has two major structures—the cell wall and the cell membrane. The cell wall of gram-positive cells is composed of multiple layers of peptidoglycan, a linear polymer of alternating units of *N*-acetylglucosamine and *N*-acetylmuramic acid. A peptide chain is attached to muramic acid. The composition of the poly-