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DNA Replication: Enzymes, Stages, and Regulation

Inaya Kat*

Department of Biochemistry, University of Sejong, Korea

DESCRIPTION

DNA replication is an essential process in all living organisms, enabling the transmission of genetic information from one generation to the next. Mechanism of DNA Replication DNA replication follows a semi-conservative model, wherein each newly synthesized DNA molecule consists of one parental strand and one newly formed strand. The process can be divided into three key stages. Initiation Replication begins at specific sequences called origins of replication. In prokaryotes, a single origin is present, whereas eukaryotes have multiple origins to facilitate faster replication. The pre-replication complex, including the origin recognition complex (ORC), helicase, and other associated proteins, assembles to unwind the DNA. Elongation Once the DNA is unwound, replication proceeds bidirectionally. DNA polymerase synthesizes new strands in a 5' to 3' direction. The leading strand is synthesized continuously, whereas the lagging strand is synthesized in short Okazaki fragments, later joined by DNA ligase. The process requires RNA primers, provided by primase, and is stabilized by single-strand binding proteins. Surveillance mechanisms ensure accurate replication and detect DNA damage. The G1/S and G2/M checkpoints monitor integrity before and after replication. The pre-replication complex (Pre-RC) forms only in G1, ensuring that replication occurs once per cycle. DNA replication is a high-fidelity process, but errors occasionally occur. Termination Replication terminates when replication forks converge or when specific termination sequences are encountered. In eukaryotes, telomeres at chromosome ends pose a challenge for replication, addressed by the enzyme telomerase, which extends telomeric sequences to prevent chromosomal shortening. Mechanisms that maintain accuracy includes DNA polymerases possess 3' to 5' exonuclease activity to remove misincorporated nucleotides. Corrects errors missed by proofreading enzymes. Fix damaged bases and bulky lesions. Regulation of DNA Replication Replication is tightly regulated to ensure accuracy and proper cell cycle progression. In eukaryotes, replication occurs during the S-phase of the cell cycle, regulated by cyclin-dependent kinases (CDKs) and checkpoint proteins. Licensing mechanisms prevent re-replication, ensuring that each origin fires only once per cycle. DNA replication defects can lead to various genetic disorders and diseases, including cancer. Unregulated replication contributes to oncogenesis, making replication proteins key targets for cancer therapy. Chemotherapeutic agents, such as DNA polymerase inhibitors and topoisomerase inhibitors, exploit these vulnerabilities. Additionally, replication enzymes are pivotal in biotechnology applications like polymerase chain reaction (PCR), essential for DNA amplification. Implications and Biological Significance. DNA replication is critical for cell division, growth, and development. Extend DNA strands; different types exist in prokaryotes and eukaryotes. Sliding Clamp and Clamp Loader Enhance processivity of DNA polymerases. Defects in replication machinery can result in chromosomal abnormalities and contribute to aging and disease. Understanding replication dynamics is also crucial for developing therapeutic interventions, including cancer treatments targeting replication-associated pathways. DNA replication is a meticulously orchestrated process critical for cellular function, growth, and inheritance.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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Corresponding author Inaya Kat, Department of Biochemistry, University of Sejong, Korea, E-mail: kat@ia.re.kr

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