

# Carbon Encyclopedia Article

## Carbon

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# Carbon

The seventeenth most abundant element on earth, carbon occurs in at least six different allotropic forms, the best known of which are diamond and graphite. It is a major component of all biochemical compounds that occur in living organisms: carbohydrates, proteins, lipids, and nucleic acids. Carbon-rich rocks and minerals such as limestone, gypsum, and marble often are created by accumulated bodies of aquatic organisms. Plants, animals, and **microorganisms** cycle carbon through the **environment**, converting it from simple compounds like **carbon dioxide** and **methane** to more complex compounds like sugars and starches, and then, by the action of **decomposers**, back again to simpler compounds. One of the most important **fossil fuels**, **coal**, is composed chiefly of carbon.