

Cell Component	Function	Present in Prokaryotes?	Present in Animal Cells?	Present in Plant Cells?
Centrosome	Unspecified role in cell division in animal cells; microtubule source in animal cells	No	Yes	No
Lysosomes	Digestion of macromolecules; recycling of worn-out organelles	No	Yes	Some
Cell wall	Protection, structural support, and maintenance of cell shape	Yes, primarily peptidoglycan	No	Yes, primarily cellulose
Chloroplasts	Photosynthesis	No	No	Yes
Endoplasmic reticulum	Modifies proteins and synthesizes lipids	No	Yes	Yes
Golgi apparatus	Modifies, sorts, tags, packages, and distributes lipids and proteins	No	Yes	Yes
Cytoskeleton	Maintains cell's shape, secures organelles in specific positions, allows cytoplasm and vesicles to move within cell, and enables unicellular organisms to move independently	Yes	Yes	Yes
Flagella	Cellular locomotion	Some	Some	No, except for some plant sperm cells
Cilia	Cellular locomotion, movement of particles along plasma membrane's extracellular surface, and filtration	Some	Some	No

Table 4.1

4.6 Connections between Cells and Cellular Activities

By the end of this section, you will be able to do the following:

- Describe the extracellular matrix
- List examples of the ways that plant cells and animal cells communicate with adjacent cells
- Summarize the roles of tight junctions, desmosomes, gap junctions, and plasmodesmata

You already know that tissue is a group of similar cells working together. As you might expect, if cells are to work together, they must communicate with each other, just as you need to communicate with others if you work on a group project. Let's take a look at how cells communicate with each other.

Extracellular Matrix of Animal Cells

While cells in most multicellular organisms release materials into the extracellular space, animal cells will be discussed as an example. The primary components of these materials are proteins, and the most abundant protein is collagen. Collagen fibers are interwoven with proteoglycans, which are carbohydrate-containing protein molecules. Collectively, we call these materials the **extracellular matrix** (Figure 4.27). Not only does the extracellular matrix hold the cells together to form a tissue, but it also

allows the cells within the tissue to communicate with each other. How can this happen?

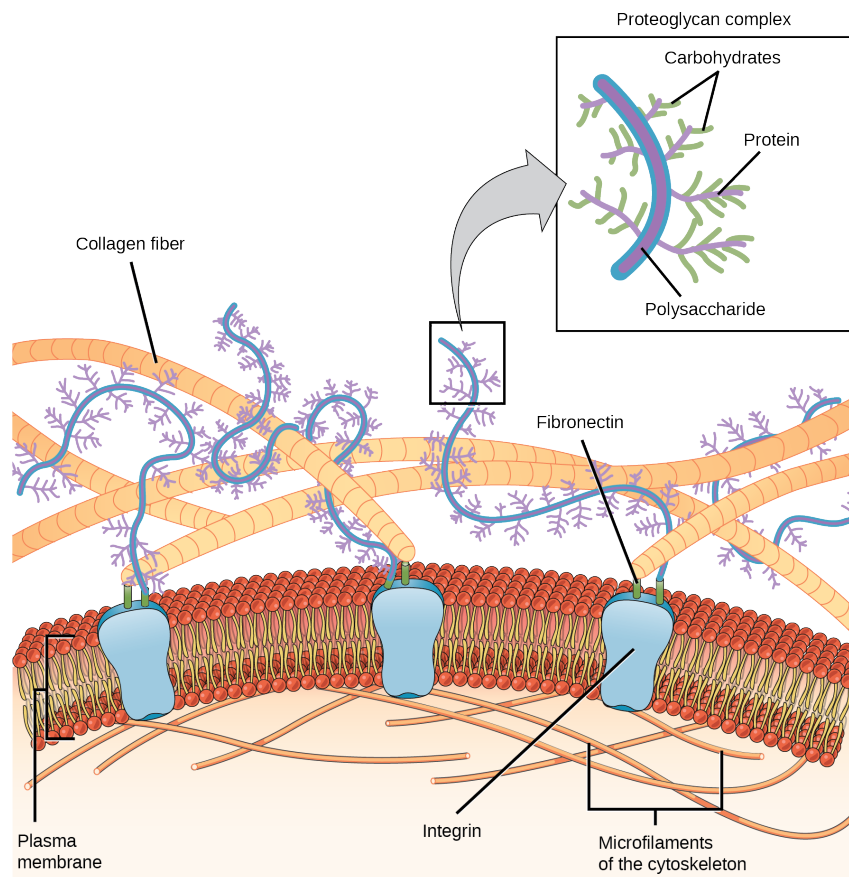


Figure 4.27 The extracellular matrix consists of a network of proteins and carbohydrates.

Cells have protein receptors on their plasma membranes' extracellular surfaces. When a molecule within the matrix binds to the receptor, it changes the receptor's molecular structure. The receptor, in turn, changes the microfilaments' conformation positioned just inside the plasma membrane. These conformational changes induce chemical signals inside the cell that reach the nucleus and turn "on" or "off" the transcription of specific DNA sections, which affects the associated protein production, thus changing the activities within the cell.

Blood clotting provides an example of the extracellular matrix's role in cell communication. When the cells lining a blood vessel are damaged, they display a protein receptor, which we call tissue factor. When tissue factor binds with another factor in the extracellular matrix, it causes platelets to adhere to the damaged blood vessel's wall, stimulates the adjacent smooth muscle cells in the blood vessel to contract (thus constricting the blood vessel), and initiates a series of steps that stimulate the platelets to produce clotting factors.

Intercellular Junctions

Cells can also communicate with each other via direct contact, or intercellular junctions. There are differences in the ways that plant and animal and fungal cells communicate. Plasmodesmata are junctions between plant cells; whereas, animal cell contacts include tight junctions, gap junctions, and desmosomes.

Plasmodesmata

In general, long stretches of the plasma membranes of neighboring plant cells cannot touch one another because the cell wall that surrounds each cell separates them ([Figure 4.8](#)). How then, can a plant transfer water and other soil nutrients from its roots, through its stems, and to its leaves? Such transport uses the vascular tissues (xylem and phloem) primarily. There also exist structural modifications, which we call **plasmodesmata** (singular = plasmodesma). Numerous channels that pass between adjacent plant cells' cell walls connect their cytoplasm, and enable transport of materials from cell to cell, and thus throughout the plant ([Figure 4.28](#)).

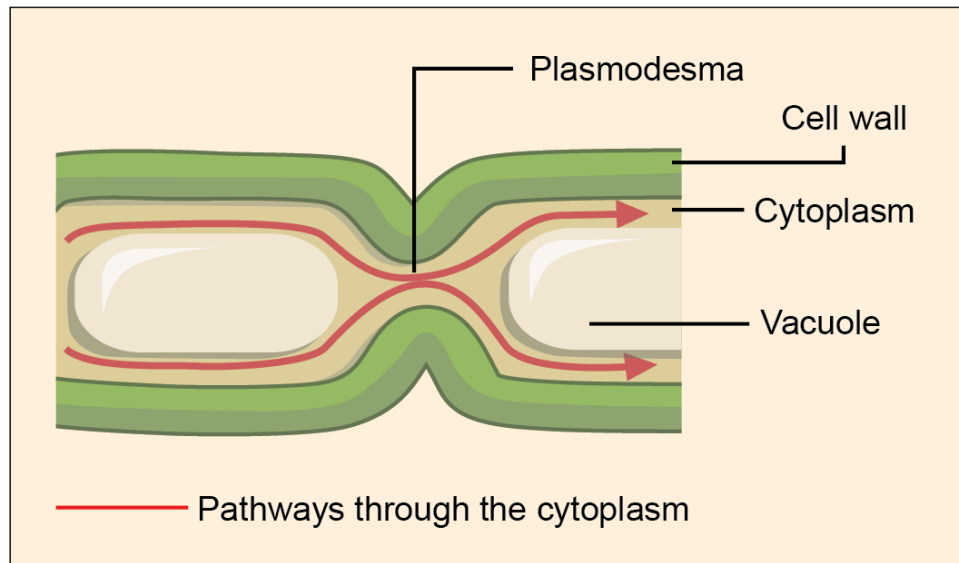


Figure 4.28 A plasmodesma is a channel between two adjacent plant cells' cell walls. Plasmodesmata allow materials to pass from one plant cell's cytoplasm to an adjacent cell's cytoplasm.

Tight Junctions

A **tight junction** is a watertight seal between two adjacent animal cells ([Figure 4.29](#)). Proteins (predominantly two proteins called claudins and occludins) tightly hold the cells against each other.

Tight junction

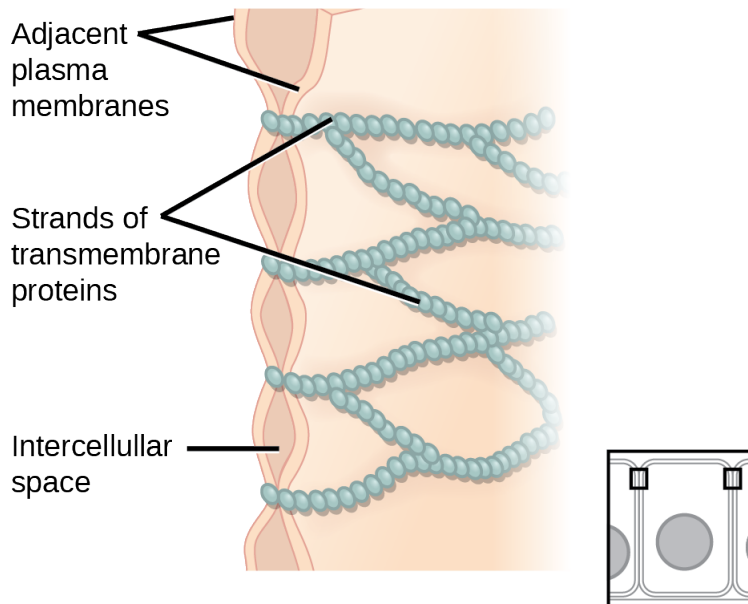


Figure 4.29 Tight junctions form watertight connections between adjacent animal cells. Proteins create tight junction adherence. (credit: modification of work by Mariana Ruiz Villareal)

This tight adherence prevents materials from leaking between the cells; tight junctions are typically found in epithelial tissues that line internal organs and cavities, and comprise most of the skin. For example, the tight junctions of the epithelial cells lining your urinary bladder prevent urine from leaking out into the extracellular space.

Desmosomes

Also only in animal cells are **desmosomes**, which act like spot welds between adjacent epithelial cells ([Figure 4.30](#)). Cadherins, short proteins in the plasma membrane connect to intermediate filaments to create desmosomes. The cadherins connect two

adjacent cells and maintain the cells in a sheet-like formation in organs and tissues that stretch, like the skin, heart, and muscles.

Desmosome

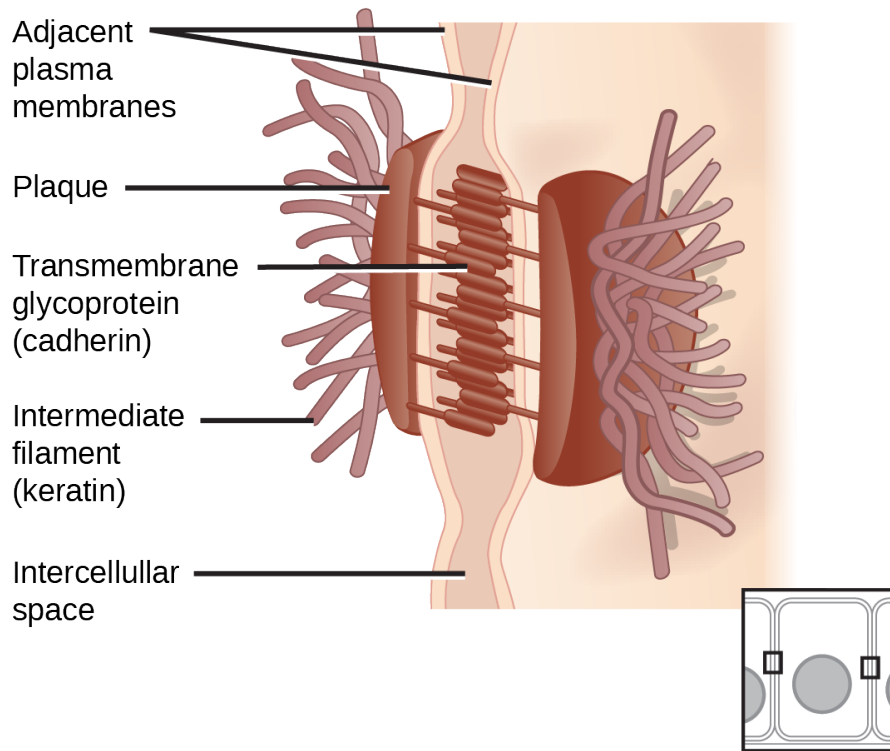


Figure 4.30 A desmosome forms a very strong spot weld between cells. Linking cadherins and intermediate filaments create it. (credit: modification of work by Mariana Ruiz Villareal)

Gap Junctions

Gap junctions in animal cells are like plasmodesmata in plant cells in that they are channels between adjacent cells that allow for transporting ions, nutrients, and other substances that enable cells to communicate ([Figure 4.31](#)). Structurally, however, gap junctions and plasmodesmata differ.

Gap junction

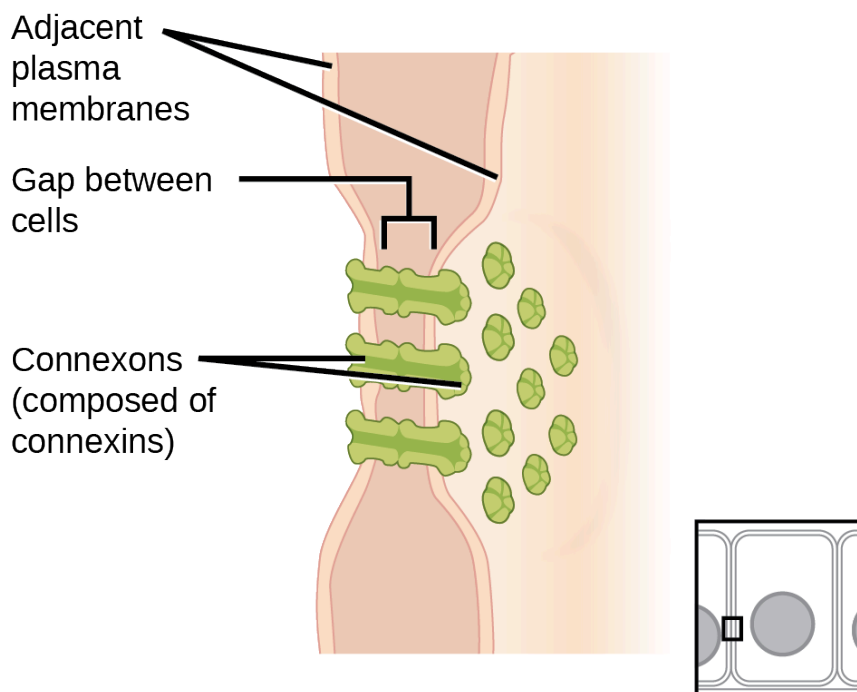


Figure 4.31 A gap junction is a protein-lined pore that allows water and small molecules to pass between adjacent animal cells. (credit: modification of work by Mariana Ruiz Villareal)

Gap junctions develop when a set of six proteins (connexins) in the plasma membrane arrange themselves in an elongated donut-like configuration - a connexon. When the connexon's pores ("doughnut holes") in adjacent animal cells align, a channel between the two cells forms. Gap junctions are particularly important in cardiac muscle. The electrical signal for the muscle to contract passes efficiently through gap junctions, allowing the heart muscle cells to contract in tandem.

LINK TO LEARNING

To conduct a virtual microscopy lab and review the parts of a cell, work through the steps of this [interactive assignment \(http://openstax.org/l/microscopy_lab\)](http://openstax.org/l/microscopy_lab).
