Oxygen (O), carbon (C), hydrogen (H), and nitrogen (N) make up 96% of most living organisms.

Table 2-1 Common Elements in Living Organisms

Element	Atomic Number[a]	% in Human Body[b]
Hydrogen (H)	1	9.5
Helium (He)	2	Trace
Carbon (C)	6	18.5
Nitrogen (N)	7	3.3
Oxygen (O)	8	65
Sodium (Na)	11	0.2
Magnesium (Mg)	12	0.1
Phosphorus (P)	15	1
Sulfur (S)	16	0.3
Chlorine (Cl)	17	0.2
Potassium (K)	19	0.4
Calcium (Ca)	20	1.5
Iron (Fe)	26	Trace

[a]Atomic number = number of protons in the atomic nucleus.

[b]Approximate percentage of atoms of this element, by weight, in the human body

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Trace elements are elements that are necessary, but present in very small quantities

- **Sulphur:** an important element in some amino acids.
- **Calcium:** used during nerve impulses
- **Iron:** found in hemoglobin (oxygen transport protein)
- **Sodium:** needed for a nerve impulse
- **Phosphorus:** in cell membrane structures and DNA