Caspases: enemies within.

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Apoptosis, an evolutionarily conserved form of cell suicide, requires specialized machinery. The central component of this machinery is a proteolytic system involving a family of proteases called caspases. These enzymes participate in a cascade that is triggered in response to proapoptotic signals and culminates in cleavage of a set of proteins, resulting in disassembly of the cell. Understanding caspase regulation is intimately linked to the ability to rationally manipulate apoptosis for therapeutic gain.